

NSAGUO: AN ANCESTRAL RITUAL OF COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

### NSAGUO: AN ANCESTRAL RITUAL OF COMMUNICATION

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Africans have a rich culture and heritage and the time has come for Africans to show the world the richness of their culture and how intrinsically African culture is linked to African religion. It is important for Africans to learn from the past in building for the future; to learn about their traditions, their culture; themselves. This is Sank fa:

Sank fa – that bird is wise,  
Look, Its beak, back turned, picks  
For the present, what is best from ancient eyes,  
Then steps forward, on ahead  
To meet the future undeterred.<sup>1</sup>



*"Return and get it; learn from the past"*

Africans need not be apologetic about their traditions and culture because of Christianity and Western propaganda. We should have pride in our traditions and remember our ancestors just as the American Indians have pride in their heritage and honor their Ancestors every November. We Africans remember our ancestors/forbears in a special ritual; this demonstration project is about this public ritual which honors the ancestors as part of our community. This is our future and we are meeting it undeterred. This is a rediscovery of our culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Kayper-Mensah, A. *Sank fa Adinkra Poems* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1976), 4.

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## DEDICATION

To my children, who have been my focus; to the one who lit the coalpot; to my parents, Kofi Eggay & Ewurabena Eziiba; to my brother Kweku Otu and to all my ancestors who have been with me throughout my journey; continue to stay with me.....



*Osram ne Nsoromma – the moon & the star*  
*Love, faithfulness and harmony*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From TIDAC's inception till now, has been an experience in "onion peeling". There have been and still are so many layers to find. My gratitude goes to my advisor Professor Kofi Asare Opoku, my mentor Professor Mercy Oduyoye, my Site Team for their encouragement and Father Hoffacker for "getting" it. I am also grateful to my brother, Dr. Yoku Shaw-Taylor for reminding me of the great pride our mother had in our culture and heritage by giving me her uncompleted work on proverbs in her own handwriting and affirming what Prof. Opoku has always said that: *"We are not alone in this world"*.

My heartfelt gratitude also goes to the Kings of Akuapem – these three Kings of Akuapem whose contributions have been and are still far reaching: Nana Offei Kwasi Agyeman IV, Krontihene of Akuapem, Okatakyie Kusi Obuadum Amoyaw V, Ohene of Aseseeso, and Osabarima Ansah Sasraku III, Mamfehene and Kyidomhene of Akuapem; and all their sub chiefs I met along the way.

It was with great honor that I was able to meet retired Catholic priest, Archbishop Peter Sarpong – thanks again to my advisor, Professor Opoku, I was grateful for the insights he provided as to why he supports the ritual; and finally to Rev. Dr. Daniel Nyante whose vision made this possible.



*HYE WONHYE – That which cannot be burnt – imperishability, endurance*

## PREFACE

Africans have always experienced migrations. When one reads historical accounts of some of the empires of Africa such as the Songhai and Ghana Empires, you find out that Africans have always traveled the land and perhaps the sea as well. The era of globalization has created a dilemma for Africans because they find themselves straddling two continents not knowing which one they actually belong to.

Africans have accepted the classifications, descriptions and interpretations of our culture and religion by others but we can remain silent no longer. As our ancestors said: *“Until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter”*. Africans now have their historians so let the world read and discover Africa in a new light. There is no African conversation without a proverb or two because as Prof. Opoku said: *“A proverb is a horse which carries you swiftly to the discovery of ideas”*. A proverb or two in a conversation makes a speech palatable to the ears. African conversations are interspersed with proverbs as you will find in this paper. This demonstration project is about a special ritual that is performed everyday of our lives as the people of Ghana and other West African countries like Nigeria do; but Christianity has created a tension about this ritual that has made it very controversial.

My multi faith track and my research into this ritual have made me less judgmental about other faith religions. I hope as you read this, you will be challenged and transformed as others have been.



*Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu – Siamese crocodiles – democracy, unity in diversity*

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Nsaguo and Christianity: A Case Study**  
*“As long as you call a person’s name, his/her spirit lives”*  
(African Proverb)

**Statement of the Problem**

The advent of Christianity on the African soil brought with it a myriad of changes. African societies had African Traditional Religion, which had its own rules, and regulations, but were now faced with change and the adoption of a new system.

Change as we all know creates tensions – tensions regarding what to keep in the traditional culture combined with the new spiritual dispensation of Christianity. These tensions affected the everyday lives of the people. Chinua Achebe’s book *Things Fall Apart* provides one of the best depictions of these tensions. In this book, one clearly sees some of the tensions created by the advent of Christianity. The society had its mores, rules and regulations that they lived by; but the advent of Christianity created turmoil.

Born-again Christians still want to observe and perform the traditional rites and rituals when it comes to naming a child or during funerals. They may not follow the rites in its original form; however, they still believe that the rites should be observed. A good example is the child-naming ceremony. Christianity “seemed” to have undermined tradition and culture by negating some of its practices and by calling the practices “paganistic”.

One of the rituals in the Akan of Ghana is Nsaguo or pouring of Nsaguo. This ritual for some reason creates two systematically opposed feelings by a group of people

who have gone through theological training: rectors and– priests. The ritual of Nsaguo has been ‘loosely’ (wording - my own) translated from the Akan language in Ghana, West Africa as ‘Nsaguo’. Nsaguo has been described by Archbishop Peter Sarpong of Ghana as “the act of pouring (a liquid) together with a prayer”. I became interested in Nsaguo because of the feeling amongst some Christians that Nsaguo is antithetical to Christianity but other Christians see Nsaguo as possibly being used as part of the Christian liturgy.

Some Christians reject Nsaguo because they believe one is praying to someone else other than God. Others believe that when performing Nsaguo, people call on lesser gods to bring evil onto their enemies. I had seen and heard my father perform Nsaguo and had heard some of the words he said but I did not fully understand what he was saying. I was raised as a Christian and my parents performed Nsaguo; during sentinel events such as births, festivals, New Year, deaths, burials, Nsaguo will be performed. I have performed Nsaguo on several of the occasions of the deaths of the members of my family. During the Nsaguo performance were periods, that still I was attending Church and using the Bible as a spiritual guide. Our household Christianity and Nsaguo were not discordant.

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

In reviewing the literature on Nsaguo and Christian theology, the following research questions emerged:

- What does Christian theology say about Nsaguo?
- Is Christian belief incompatible with Nsaguo?
- How is Nsaguo performed: what is the step-wise process of the ritual?

- What words are used, and in what sequence? What do the words and their sequence mean to participants?
- Why do some (Ghanaian) Christians accept Nsaguo and others find it incompatible with their Christian beliefs?

The reasons given by some Christians who do not accept Nsaguo is that they believe Nsaguo is a prayer and a prayer is made to God and no one else. The Christian theology states that Jesus Christ died and saved us and so there is no need to pray to anyone else but to Jesus Christ.

Those who accept it see Nsaguo as a channel of communication with kin and a way to channel memories about loved ones while acknowledging God. It is a prayer to God and a remembrance. There are Christians do not believe that when they perform Nsaguo that they are going against Christian theology.

My hypothesis is that Nsaguo is an African ritual of remembrance and the tradition is not antithetical to Christian theology based on what we know about Christianity and Nsaguo.<sup>1</sup>

### **Methods and Data Collection**

This study uses an idiographic approach to collect data on Nsaguo. This is a case study of beliefs and practices of Nsaguo in the Ghanaian community of Christians. I used two main methods:

- In-depth interviews with three different kinds of key informants. I will interview three different key informants including: practitioners, Christian Priests and Chiefs and Queen Mothers who are Christians, and
- Participant observation techniques.

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<sup>1</sup>Discussions with Professor Opoku and Krontihene.

In-depth interviews are flexible techniques that give the interviewer more freedom to direct the flow of conversation based on key themes. Participant observation is the method of field research that allows the investigator to participate in the event or social phenomenon under study.

These methods will allow me to (1) describe the core process of Nsaguo and (2) compare the teachings of Christianity on Nsaguo and the practice of Nsaguo among Ghanaian Christians. To understand what Christian theology states about Nsaguo, I will rely on the interpretive technique of hermeneutics to examine the words of the Nsaguo and the Psalms of Imprecation.

#### *Data Collection*

My research would take me to Ghana to for field research to interview the key informants; participant observation activities will be performed in Ghana and the United States. I will also conduct some interviews in the United States. Historical data on Christian theology and Nsaguo will be collected in Ghana and the United States

#### **Findings and Conclusions**

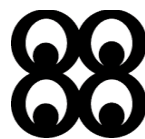
The data will show that Nsaguo is not antithetical to Christian belief and can be incorporated into Christian practices because:

- There are specific passages in the Bible referring to Nsaguo
- Accepted interpretations of Christian theology do not reject Nsaguo. For instance, Sis. Rosina Ampah, an Episcopalian priest did not find anything wrong in performing Nsaguo when she had a housewarming for her orphanage because she believes that the ancestors are part of us and that life is made up of the living, the

dead and the yet unborn.<sup>2</sup> Neither did Rev. Ben Quarshie find it offensive when Nsaguo was performed after he graduated from seminary and came home for the family celebrations.

- The words and sequence used in the performance of Nsaguo make it a ritual of remembrance, not a ritual or worship. The performance of Nsaguo is not an act of worship when names are called out in remembrance.
- Finally, the data and analytic framework will describe how to correctly perform Nsaguo.

This study will culminate in an educational video and handbook on Nsaguo. This will be a pedagogical tool about the ritual and the cultural significance within the Christian community. The video and handbook will provide a demonstration of Nsaguo and how it may be incorporated within Christian liturgy. The effect of the educational video will be tested by conducting a pre and post test survey asking viewers about their understanding and attitude regarding Nsaguo. This will be a significant method to test the impact of the video.



*Mate Masie*

*"What I hear, I keep" - symbolizing wisdom, knowledge and prudence*

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<sup>2</sup>Telephone conversation with Rev. Rosina Ampah.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Nea wadi kan na wofa n'akyi gya – *If one person starts a fire, others take live coals out of it* –  
Ghanaian proverb –

We have heard the adage that the road to heaven is paved with good intentions and I say that the path to knowledge is paved with a lot of questions. This is a quest – my pilgrimage of sorts with my need to know driving me because we are all on a journey in one way or another. I have always had a lot of questions about my life, some have been answered along the way, and others are still unfolding. Knowing my ethnicity has played a major role in my journey. Some of the questions I have are: why was I born, a Ghanaian, an African? Why am I here? Why do we dress differently? West Africans have a specific way of dressing which makes us unique. Ghanaians have a way of dressing for different functions; there is a special way of dressing for special occasions such as funerals, child naming, weddings etc.

What is Christianity? Is Christianity what God gave to us Africans? We have a saying in Akan that “No-one teaches a child who God is”; so the question is, have we always had the knowledge of who God is? What religion did Africans have prior to the advent of Christianity? Were Africans aware of a higher authority before the missionaries? Why did we accept Christianity? According to the Bible, Jesus was humble, so why are some born again Christians within our society so arrogant? This

arrogance is shown in so many different ways when interacting with them such as if you are not born again, you will not be invited to their circle of events.

There was an actual television series which I wrote a sermon about on the arrogance of born again Christians. A daughter of born-again Christians died and there was a patient who needed a heart. The parents refused to donate their daughter's heart because the patient was not a "believer/ a born-again Christian". The patient did not want her attorney Eli to take the parents to court because she did not want to put the parents through any more grief. In the end, the attorney went against the wishes of his client and found out that the daughter of the "born-again Christians had been questioning her faith prior to her death. But my question was who showed mercy, the non-believer or the born-again Christians? I would have expected the born-again Christians to have shown mercy to the point where the non-believer would marvel at their faith and want to find out more about the God they serve, but no they could not mask their fury at having been "forced" to give their believer daughter's heart to a non-believer. If Jesus Christ is the way, does it mean that all those who are not Christians are going to perish in Hades?

According to Professor Opoku, in the case of Christianity, for example, the early missionaries demanded a complete break with tradition as evidence of one's conversion.

It was assumed in the early days of missionary activity that there must be Europeanization before Christianization and consequently traditional life was brought under heavy fire. Conversion, therefore, led to the abandonment of many of the rituals practiced in traditional religion and further led to the complete disregard of most of the gods, their priests and other functionaries who played an important role in the religion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Lagos: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), 167.

## What is Nsaguo?

So based on this, my assumption is that for our parents to have accepted Christianity meant they had to reject some of our God ordained religion; however, I realize that in the case of Nsaguo<sup>4</sup>, my father never rejected Nsaguo. My father always performed Nsaguo on several occasions when it called for it. This is how I learned about Nsaguo in the first place. In my research, I found out that there are two kinds of Nsaguo, 1) a congregational ritual that is conducted in public for all to see and 2) a ritual that is conducted by priests of a particular deity. This demonstration project is about the first ritual; a congregational ritual that is always performed in public and can be performed in everyday activities as well as on special occasions.

According to the Akan, Nsaguo is a congregational prayer – a communication between the living and the spirit world. Some of the issues that some born- again Christians have with Nsaguo is that the words used when performing Nsaguo, is to curse their enemies and ask that evil befall them. According to Rev. Peter Sarpong, as a form of prayer, Nsaguo is performed to the Supreme Being, the deities and the ancestors. The fact that deities and ancestors are mentioned in the performance of Nsaguo, has offended many. Some Christians have therefore described it as superstition and an unacceptable form of worship.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Nsaguo is the act of pouring a drink in remembrance of the ancestors. It will be further explained later. Most people refer to Nsaguo as “Nsaguo” even though they are not the same act.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Sarpong, *Nsaguo* (Accra, Anansesem Publications, Ltd, 1996), vii.



The phrase '*Nsaguo*' is used to describe the only congregational prayer in Akan religious practices. The word '*nsa*' on paper can mean hand, liquor, or alcoholic beverage and it is in the way the word is pronounced that you know what the context in which the word is being used. In the context of this phrase, the word means 'liquor or alcoholic beverage'. The verb '*gu*', from which the abstract noun '*guo*' is formed, has meanings in different contexts. '*Gu agoro*' is to bring a game or performance to an end by disruption. '*Gu dwa*' is to 'spoil it' especially in a commercial transaction.

*Gu* also means 'to bring a meeting to an end'. '*Gu anim ase*' is to act shamefully or disgracefully to let oneself and others down; publicly shame or disgrace oneself or another. *Gu* is also used as transitive verb when the meaning is more or less defined. The transfer of liquid, in small quantities at a time, is implied. '*Gu aduane so*' means 'to ladle out soup and share the meat in the soup bowl into individual soup bowls/plates.' This is a continual process and it proceeds in small portions at a time. The repetitive form of the word, '*gugu*' is a verb with the same implied meaning. '*Bosuo regugu*' means, it is drizzling. '*Gugu so nsuo*' means 'sprinkle water over it'. In these examples, the meaning implied is that the liquid drips out sparingly and in small quantities at a time or in controlled and orderly fashion.

There is also '*gu nsa*'. '*Gu*' is translated as 'pour' in Akan Christian literature. However, to 'pour' means to 'discharge copiously' or 'descend heavily'. But Akans describe heavy downpour of rain as '*nsuo reto*' not '*nsuo regugu*'. *Gu* or *gugu* is not used to describe a heavy rain or downpour. Therefore, it is incorrect to translate '*gu*', by 'pour'. *Nsaguo*, as a physical act, can only be translated as 'sprinkling of liquor' on the ground or objects. Philologically, the Akan congregational prayer, '*Nsaguo*', cannot be

described as ‘Nsaguo pouring’. So, what is ‘*Nsaguo*’ and its significance in Akan religious/spiritual practices?

The Akan observe a rite called Nsaguo, a prayer which is an act of communicating with the Supreme Being, deities, ancestral spirits and the spirit world in general. The rite demands the pouring of a liquid substance on the ground, accompanied by the reciting of a prayer inspired by the occasion.<sup>6</sup> Any kind of drinkable liquid is used for Nsaguo. Some of the liquids used are as follows: pito or a native beer brewed from fermented corn, palm wine or nsafuo, akpeteshie, liquor distilled from palm wine, or imported drinks such as schnapps, whisky, rum and gin. Water can also be used.

### **Why Nsaguo?**

As an African who was brought up within the African/Ghanaian/Fanti/Christian cultures, I learned to appreciate my culture first and so it is up to me to show the world how much my culture means to me. Nsaguo is part of my culture and my culture is who and what I am; my culture is very heavily entrenched in my being, and I am very proud of it. Why did the missionaries deem some of our cultural practices to be antithetical to Christianity? It seems our society is allowing others to dictate how we should view our culture. The traditions existed before Christianity. As stated before, I chose the research into Nsaguo because I found that this ritual for some reason creates two systematically opposed feelings by a group of people who have gone through theological training: rectors and— priests.

When my father died, I was unable to go to his funeral and so the next time I traveled to Ghana, my mum told me about certain traditional rites I had to perform. In

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<sup>6</sup>Nkansa K. Kyeremateng, *The Akans of Ghana: Their Customs, History and Institutions* (Accra: Optimum Design & Publishing Service, 2004), 93.

effect I had to “bury” my father symbolically. That meant I had to meet the Head of the Abusua (Clan) find the Okyeame (Chief Linguist/historian), take some drinks to the family and then go to his graveside and perform the necessary rites.

The first incident occurred when we went to the family house. When we were sitting down on a bench, a group of family members fell off the bench. The reaction of the Okyeame was “Oh yes the ancestors are here and they are making their presence known”. He started by performing Nsaguo calling upon God and calling the names of the ancestors and especially my father. In essence he told my father the reason why I was there and asked him to protect me. After that we got in the car and went to the cemetery where he also performed Nsaguo and said a prayer.

My mother had told me that I needed to bring some of the burial soil around the graveside with me so I took some of the soil and put it in a plastic bag. On the way back, just as the prophets had told Lot not to look back at his city, the Okyeame told me not to look back and to keep looking forward until we got to the main street. As we were leaving, I felt intense heat on my shoulder as if someone had touched me and I told the Okyeame and he said my father had touched me. That was so powerful to me. When I got back, I relayed the story to my mom and she concurred with the Okyeame that my father’s spirit had touched me. That curiosity and the need to know more about my culture has always been with me and I thank God that I am now able to tell my story in order to learn more about my culture. Nsaguo I became interested in Nsaguo because some Christians feel that Nsaguo is antithetical to Christianity and others see Nsaguo as possibly being used as part of the Christian liturgy.

### **Instances where Nsaguo is performed**

Nsaguo has its own integrity; this is a ritual that is performed in the society. Nsaguo is performed when there are celebrations for the birth of a child, when a child matures – puberty, when there is a death. It spans the beginning of life, through the different stages in life and ends with the death. Nsaguo plays an important part in other social activities such as community meetings, national meetings. As a communicative tool, Nsaguo is used at these activities to remember our loved ones - the ancestors to be a part of the activity. The following activities are activities where Nsaguo is performed: Childbirth, Maturity, Death, Social activities, Shrine, Community events such as the Asafosa Peace Ritual, and Durbar. There are several occasions in which Nsaguo is poured; at the beginning of life and at the end.

According to T.N.O. Quarcoopome, the life cycle of man runs from the cradle to the grave. In the traditional African setting the landmarks in this life cycle are birth, puberty, marriage and death. Each of these stages is considered crucial and is therefore marked by considerable ritual and ceremony which shed much light on African religious ideas and practices. Today, the observance of these rites has been affected by the inroads of Western civilization and foreign religions like Christianity and Islam.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Childbirth**

Birth is regarded as one of the critical and important situations of life. The first eight days after birth are considered the most critical. The beginning of life for an African is not even at

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<sup>7</sup>T.N.O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: African University Press, 1987), 110.

child birth but on the eighth day when the child is recognized and given a name. Because of this, the child is named only after the 8<sup>th</sup> day.<sup>8</sup> There have been different reasons given for naming the child on this day. One is that when a child is born in Akan society, for the first eight days it does not deserve any loving treatment, because of the people's belief that a newly born child is a ghost, and its ghost-mother, in the nether world, would be in search of it. If, the baby died before the 8<sup>th</sup> day, it was concluded that the search had succeeded.<sup>9</sup> Nsaguo is performed at this social activity.

### Maturity/Puberty

Puberty is the transition from childhood into adulthood and in the West African context it is an occasion for considerable ritual and ceremony. It is the coming of age for boys and girls in the society. Puberty rites are performed to usher the young adults into full adulthood.<sup>10</sup> There are girls nobility rites and boys initiation from childhood to adulthood. At both of these rites, Nsaguo is performed to invite the ancestral spirits of the families to be present at these occasions. These initiation ceremonies for the young people prepare them for the most responsible phase of their life which is marriage.<sup>11</sup>

### Marriage

In West African societies as elsewhere, marriage is an integral part of the social cycle through which everyone is expected to pass. The various puberty rites are all

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<sup>8</sup> Nkansa K. Kyeremateng, *The Akans of Ghana*, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Portsmouth New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc, 1991), 104.

performed to ensure a happy, stable and successful marriage.<sup>12</sup> Marriage is the institution which sets the stage for a responsible and stable family. It is considered more as a group union between two families.<sup>13</sup> After both families have agreed to the marriage, a ceremony is performed where Nsaguo is performed.

### Death

Death is the last of the rites of passage that a person has to go through on earth. However, death is not the end of human existence. There is life beyond the grave, a belief shared by all religions. The traditional belief is that when the breath of life leaves a person, he stops breathing and he is declared dead. The physical frame rots in the ground but the soul, the essential person survives death and returns to God. Before God or the ancestors, the soul has to render account of its stewardship on earth.<sup>14</sup> Death in Africa is seen as the necessary end of man and the Akans set aside occasions to remember the dead in libation. The dead person can be remembered on the following set-aside dates, the 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> and the 80<sup>th</sup> day after death. The final one on the anniversary of death occurs after one year during which there is a special feast for the living and the dead.

### Social Activities – Asafosa Peace Ritual

The Asafosa Ritual for Peace in the Mamfe Township predates the introduction of Christianity. It is part of the Ohum festival of Akuapem in the Eastern Region. The

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<sup>12</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 120.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 64.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. 125.

Nsaguo ritual may be one of the ceremonies that will be videotaped and used as part of the educational video for this demonstration project.

### Community Events – Durbar

The Durbar is the culmination of the festivities of the Ohum festival. At the Asafosa Peace Ritual, there is a somber atmosphere where the town is making sure that all issues/disputes are resolved. There is a coming together of the town to discuss steps for the new year of the town. The attire worn is that which is worn for a funeral. The durbar on the other hand, is a very festive affair to end the week-long Ohum festival.

Tensions:

Nsaguo can be performed at any gathering; specifically: nationwide epidemic, war, ritual for the ancestors on the sacred stools, marriage, nobility rites, apprenticeship, child naming ceremonies, official meetings, family discussions, before leaving home for a long or short journey and upon returning home after an absence of several years, upon graduation, the success of a business, the building of a house, a town meeting, durbars, enstoolment of a chief and before during and after funerals rites.

### **Christianity & Cultural Tensions**

#### Ghanaian Missionaries

As stated earlier, Christianity created tensions between the Traditions and Christianity. These tensions are still occurring and it was very difficult for the early converts to Christianity to deal with. They were faced with having to accept this new religion and at the same time “let go” of the culture they have known and lived by all these years. This tension is portrayed in an excellent way in Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart”. The advent of Christianity created a chasm where the Traditionalists and the Christians could not cross that divide. Achebe chose his title well because what he refers

to as “Things” are the traditions and customs that the villagers lived by and when they fall apart, the center cannot hold. The society falls apart as well. It is almost as if you have the creation of anarchy in an otherwise lawful society; when there is no rule of law, things really do fall apart.

Examples of the tensions created by Christianity were evident in the lives of three early converts: Jacobus Capitein, Carl Christian Reindorf and David Asante. They were Ghanaians, who were recruited to assist the European and West Indian missionaries in spreading Christianity throughout the Gold Coast. These Ghanaians became leaders in their communities, but they also lived in controversy most of their lives. Nevertheless, they succeeded in making important contributions.

#### David Asante

David Asante (December 23, 1834-October 13, 1892), a missionary with the famous Basel (Lutheran) Mission, helped to make Twi the powerful literary language it is today. The son of Owusu-Akyem, an Akropong citizen of the ruling Asona clan, David Asante was one of the first converts to Christianity in his birthplace, Akropong, capital of Akuapem, a state 34 miles (48 km) northeast of Accra. He began his education as a houseboy to Basel missionaries, the Revs. J.F. Widmann and J.C. Dieterle, eventually becoming their personal assistant. His first task was to learn English; his mother tongue, Twi, was not then a written language. He was an intelligent and industrious scholar, and was baptized a Christian on Christmas Day, 1847 at the age of 13. In 1848, Asante became one of the five foundation pupils of the Akropong Basel Mission Seminary, or



training college. There he studied for five years, learning German as well as Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.<sup>15</sup>

After qualifying as a teacher-catechist, Asante was appointed to Larteh, 5 mi (8 km) southeast of Akropong where he combated fetishism and other un-Christian customs. He established a congregation there, and built the mission house which was still standing in the mid-1970s, along with a chapel. From Larteh he was transferred to Gyadam, then the capital of Akyem Kotoku on the Birem River about 15 miles (24 km) north of Kyebi. Here his task was to help the Rev. Simon Süss, who was trying to establish a congregation there. Here, too, he found he had to combat fetishism and related practices. He was later transferred to the Akropong Seminary as a teacher, and also collaborated with the Rev. J. G. Christaller (q.v.) in the writing of Twi books for schools.<sup>16</sup>

In 1857, the church sent him to Basel, Switzerland, where he trained as a pastor. His brother Oforikae joined him there in 1860, but died of tuberculosis a year later. David Asante completed his studies in 1862, was ordained a pastor in the Lutheran Church and then in June, returned home to serve the Mission at Akropong, then under Widmann's direction. He was transferred to Larteh after his marriage on July 28, 1864, to Lydia Martha, a teacher in the girls' boarding school at Abokobi. At Larteh, Asante found that Christians were being persecuted, and the same practices he had condemned in the 1850s were continuing. In 1871, he was sent on a dangerous mission to Begoro, north of Kyebi, one of the divisions of the Akyem Abuakwa state, to learn what he could about two Basel

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<sup>15</sup>L.H. Ofosu-Appiah, ed. *The Encyclopedia Africana Dictionary of African Biography (in 20 volumes) Vol. One Ethiopia – Ghana* (New York, NY: Reference Publications, 1997), 1.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

missionaries, the Revs. Friederich A. Ramseyer and J. Kühne, who had been captured by the Asante. He was unable to obtain information, but the missionaries were released after the British occupation of the Asante capital Kumasi, in the Sagrenti War of 1873-74.<sup>17</sup>

In 1872, Asante was sent to Kukurantumi, another division of Akyem Abuakwa, to establish a mission station there. He opened a school for converts, and built a stable congregation, consisting mainly of freed slaves. In 1875, he was transferred to Kyebi to replace a European missionary. Here he met with the strongest opposition he was to encounter throughout his career. It came from the *Okyenhene* (paramount chief of Akyem Abuakwa), Amoako Atta I (*q.v.*), who was Asante's cousin, as well as from the chief's mother. The quarrel stemmed from Amoako Atta's opposition to the conversion of slaves to Christianity, and to the abolition of slavery by the British. Amoako Atta and his entourage felt that Christianization and the abolition of slavery were undermining their power and revenue.<sup>18</sup>

He felt that the Christians were free to defy his authority because they lived in separate communities, and regarded the missionaries as their leaders. Asante, who supported both the conversion of slaves and the abolition of slavery, insisted on having his way despite the persecution of Christians, which continued. Finally, matters came to a head and the British government asked the Basel Mission to transfer Asante out of Kyebi. Persecution of the Christians continued after his departure. Asante was next transferred to another non-Christian community at Nsakyé, near Aburi, about 20 miles (32 km) north of

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<sup>17</sup>Ofosu-Appiah, ed. *The Encyclopedia Africana Dictionary of African Biography*, 1.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

Accra. Here his work was made difficult because mulattoes from Accra, who were regarded by Africans as Europeans and Christians, continued to consult the local fetish, named "Onyaawonsu"<sup>19</sup> ("Soothsayer".) Asante eventually managed to check this practice, and established a stable congregation.

He was later sent to Anum, on the east bank of the Volta, 50 miles (80 km) inland, to reopen a mission station that had been abandoned due to the Asante and Togoland wars of the period. He revived enthusiasm for Christianity in the area, traveling as far as Palimé in Togo, and Salaga in what is now northern Ghana, to promote his missionary work.

Asante also urged the mission to begin work in the states of Buem and Krakye (Krachi), both located in what is now the Volta Region of Ghana. Here he met with opposition from the local population, who still worshipped a god called Odente. In 1885, Asante was given a period of rest, which he used to travel through the Central Province of the Gold Coast (between Accra and Takoradi), selling copies of the Twi Bible, which he had helped Christaller translate.<sup>20</sup>

Asante visited Cape Coast and Saltpond, as well as Kumasi, where he met with Ramseyer, the Basel missionary who had been held there as a captive of the Asante from 1869-1874. He was transferred back to Akropong in 1888, but was unpopular among the people there because of his frankness in prosecuting abuses. He often defended Christian converts before the tribunal of the *Omanhene* (paramount chief) of Akropong. During his

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<sup>19</sup>Oforu-Appiah, ed. *The Encyclopedia Africana Dictionary of African Biography*. 1

<sup>20</sup>Ibid..

missionary life, Asante produced several books in Twi, among them translations of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a book about ancient heathenism in Germany, and a German history book, which became known as the *Kapa History*. He wrote a Twi hymn, coined new Twi words, and contributed to the establishment of Twi as a literary language.<sup>21</sup>

Asante was appointed to lead the Kyebi mission, and proceeded to antagonize his own people, including his direct cousin Amoako Atta the first, who was the chief. Amoako Atta, the first had mistakenly thought that Asante, being an Akan and son of a member of the royal family, could be relied upon to protect the cherished beliefs and customs of his court. Asante professed sympathy with Amoako Atta, the first's concern about conversion among his royal slaves and palace functionaries, but subsequent events revealed his real thoughts to the contrary.<sup>22</sup>

Asante worked tirelessly to undermine Amoako Atta, the first as chief. He seemed to have singled him out for discrimination and embarrassment, and interfered with his jurisdiction. Using Asante, the Basel Missionaries had made no secret of their prejudice against the Akyem judicial system since the 1860's. The cumulative effect of Asante's intimidation of the *Okyenhene* and his chiefs between 1874 and 1877 created a climate of frustration and despair.

The exodus of freed slaves reduced the population, and drastically worsened the problem of scarce food supplies. Asante even went to the extent of taking the chief to

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<sup>21</sup> Ofosu-Appiah, ed. *Carl Christian Reindorf*. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ofosu-Appiah, ed. *The Encyclopedia Africana Dictionary of African Biography*, 1

court, which resulted in the chief's imprisonment. He succeeded in creating an atmosphere of fear, and encouraged the chief's former slaves to tell lies in order to be set free. This undermined the authority of the royal family, and within a year of their chief's exile, many members of the court were left bankrupt. Asante died at Akropong in 1892.<sup>23</sup>

### Jacobus Capitein

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an economic boom built on slave trading had made Europe wealthy. At this time, the west coast of Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast, had its share of forts and castles. Elmina and other locations along the Cape Coast served as centers of trading and slavery. During this time, a young slave boy originally taken in slavery from Elmina caught the eye of a wealthy woman, who decided to adopt him. He was given the name Jacobus K. Capitein. He subsequently traveled to the Netherlands with his adoptive family, where he was educated and became the first African theology student.<sup>24</sup>

As one of the first known sub-Saharan Africans to study at a European university, the freed slave Jacobus Capitein became a celebrity in Holland for his academic and religious achievements and later returned to his homeland to evangelize the indigenous population. Capitein was born on the Gold Coast but his exact place and date of birth are unknown. According to his own account, he was kidnapped from his parents at the age of seven or eight and sold to Dutch sea-captain named Arnold Steenhard who gave him as a present to his friend the merchant Jacob van Gogh. Capitein lived with his master for two years in the Dutch Fort of Elmina in Ghana before leaving with him for Holland in 1728.

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<sup>23</sup> Noel Smith, *The Churches*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> David N. Kpobi, *Mission in Chains: The Life, Theology & Ministry of the Ex-Slave Jacobus E.J. Capitein* (Zoeteimeer: Ujtgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993), 5.

With his entry into The Netherlands, Capitein won his freedom since slavery at that time was officially banned. He moved with his guardian to The Hague where he learned Dutch and after one year was able to attend the catechism class of the local Reformed Church where he was later baptized. Very early in his education he announced his desire to become a missionary in Africa. Being an excellent student, Capitein obtained the support of Van Gogh and other guardians to pay for his higher education and finally begin his studies in theology at the University of Leiden in 1737.

For the next four years, Capitein pursued his studies, expanding his knowledge in Latin, Greek and Hebrew and becoming one of the best students of his faculty. His dissertation on slavery and Christian liberty (as not being opposed to each other) was presented in 1742 and gained him widespread attention and appreciation among theologians and slave traders. Having finished his studies, Capitein soon became the first black minister of the Reformed Church and in the same year boarded a ship to return to Africa.

Immediately after his arrival in Elmina in October 1742, Capitein took up his missionary work. He tried to revive a religious school for mulatto children that had been started by the Dutch and translated religious texts into Fanti. He was ordained, and served as a pastor from 1717 to 1747. His thesis in college stated that God deliberately imposed slavery on Africa, the “Dark Continent” because that was the only way they could hear of the Gospel from the Europeans. Capitein believed God would teach the truth of Jesus and bring light to the people of Africa.

He became famous for preaching theology, and he developed a theology specifically in support of slavery. This theology was very popular; since it encouraged

Europeans to justify slavery through theology. When Capitein returned to the Gold Coast, he attempted to establish a mulatto school, but failed. His work was hampered by setbacks and personal defeats stemming from the lack of support by the West Indian Trading Company and his church Classis in Holland. Embittered and in debt, he died in 1842, frustrated and bitter at the early age of 30.<sup>25</sup>

#### Carl Christian Reindorf

Carl Christian Reindorf (May 31, 1834 to July 1, 1917) was an evangelical pastor, scholar, trader, physician, and historian who worked with the Basel Mission and was the author of the historical classic, *A History of the Gold Coast and Asante*. Completed in 1889 and published in 1895, it drew on oral tradition to record an epoch of the African past, the outlines of which might otherwise have vanished beyond recall. He was born at Pram Pram, east of Accra, in 1834, to Carl Hackenburg Reindorf, a Danish soldier, and Anowah Cudjoe, a Ga woman from the Asare district of Accra. During his childhood, he was adopted by a fetish shrine called Digbla, and the shrine took him under its protection. He might not have become a Christian at all if he had not escaped from the fetish in 1840, and come to Accra. In Accra he attended school at Christiansborg Castle, and was baptized a Christian two years later, in 1844.<sup>26</sup>

He left Christiansborg Castle in 1846 to attend the Basel Mission School under the Rev. Johannes Zimmerman (*q.v.*) [1825-76], but Zimmerman's way of teaching the Ga language displeased him. He left school and started trading, sometimes crossing the Volta River to trade in Eweland, to the east. But his parents wanted him to finish school,

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<sup>25</sup> Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ofosu-Appiah, "Carl Christian Reindorf" 1.

so he was brought back to the Basel Mission, where a high school had been established. After the bombardment of Christiansborg during the poll tax riots of 1854, the mission moved to Accra and then to Abokobi, 15 miles (24 km) away. Here a new mission house was built. Carl's education was interrupted again, as he worked as a catechist at Damfa (Danfa), in the same area. Here he taught his pupils to read Ga books, and interpreted the Bible for them.<sup>27</sup>

In 1856, Reindorf composed a hymn (No. 259). He worked under the German missionary August Steinhauser, who sent him to Odumase in the Krobo district, about 50 miles (80 km) northeast of Accra, to see the chief, Odonkor Azzu. As a result of his visits, Azzu, who had already given one of his sons, Tei, to the Basel missionary Zimmerman to be educated, sent another three of his children to be trained by the mission. One of them later became Sir Emmanuel Mate Kole (*q.v.*). In 1857, during a stay in Odumase, Reindorf composed another Ga hymn (No. 343). He was appointed successor to Steinhauser at Abokobi, and during his period of service converted a fetish priest, Akoto Badu of Agbowo, to Christianity. He became a full catechist in 1857. In 1858 he took part in the short, local war between the Gas and the Krobos. After peace was made, he was transferred to Krobo in 1859 as a missionary, acting as assistant to Zimmerman. In 1860, Reindorf was transferred to Akropong-Akuapem as an assistant teacher at the Theological Seminary there.<sup>28</sup>

He retired for a while in 1862 to his farm, called Hebron, near Aburi, a few miles away, and established a coffee plantation there. He was later asked to open a mission at

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<sup>27</sup>Ofosu-Appiah, *Carl Christian Reindorf*, 1.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*.



Teshie, on the coast 10 mi (16 km) east of Accra, but found it difficult to make converts. He was transferred to Christiansborg, but again returned to Teshie to try to make converts. Although he offered the children money to attend school, he was not successful in gaining converts. Reindorf was again transferred back to Christiansborg to teach in the new Basel Mission Middle School.<sup>29</sup> In 1866 he took part in the local war between the Adas (a Ga-Adangme group)<sup>30</sup> and the Awunas (Ewes from the Volta Region)<sup>31</sup>, acting as assistant surgeon.<sup>32</sup>

After the war he was appointed head teacher of the Osu Middle School. In 1869, he was appointed assistant superintendent of the Christiansborg Church, and later became a presbyter (i.e. a priest who acts as overseer of the congregation). In 1870, he took part in the Akwamu-Ga war (a local war in which the Gold Coast government supported the Gas), serving with a contingent from Christiansborg on the side of the Gas. After government troops defeated the Akwamus, he received a letter of encouragement from the Administrator, H. T. Ussher (in office from 1867-72, later governor from 1879-80), after he had welcomed a contingent from Lagos, in what is now Nigeria, with a song composed for the occasion.<sup>33</sup>

He acted as a surgeon and treated several people for gunshot wounds. After the war he returned to the Mission. On October 13, 1872, he was ordained a full minister of the church, and stationed at Mayera, near Accra. He started a school at Mayera with 12

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<sup>29</sup>Ofosu-Appiah, *Carl Christian Reindorf*, 1

<sup>30</sup> The Ga-Adangme form about 8.0% of the national population of Ghana.

<sup>31</sup> The Ewes are 12.7% of the Ghanaian population.

<sup>32</sup>Ofosu-Appiah, *Carl Christian Reindorf*, 1.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

boys from Accra, and attracted boys to the school by paying for their clothing, tuition fees, board, and lodging. He preached in the neighboring villages and stirred up enthusiasm for Christianity, converting fetish priests and others. His travels enabled him to learn a good deal about medicinal herbs, and he trained others to diagnose diseases, thus saving the lives of several European missionaries. He stayed in Mayera for ten years, and in about 1882 was transferred to Christiansborg, where he remained another ten years. In 1883, he started the Basel Mission in Accra. In 1893, he was obliged by failing health to retire to his village, Hebron, where aside from farming; he did missionary work at Adenkrebi, where the Rev. Saeger had put him in charge of a Mission. In 1907, however, he again left Hebron to return to Christiansborg.<sup>34</sup>

When work on the revision of the Ga Bible began, Reindorf decided to participate, and saw the revised version completed and published in 1912. But his great work, completed in 1889 and published in Basel in 1895, was his classic of historical scholarship, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*. Although written by a man whose level of formal education was not high, it won him a permanent place in the annals of African history by preserving an oral tradition that would otherwise have disappeared. The work was written in English and Ga, and its preface shows that Reindorf was both a patriot and a nationalist, bent on leaving a memorial for posterity and setting an example for others to follow. Reindorf died in 1917.<sup>35</sup>

According to Kwame Bediako, the achievement of Reindorf gains even greater significance when viewed by the Christian missionary context which produced him, and

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<sup>34</sup>Ofosu-Appiah, *Carl Christian Reindorf*, 1.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

in which he lived and worked. During his association with Johannes Zimmerman at Christiansborg and later at Abokobi, Reindorf came into contact with the peculiar integration of church planting, education and agriculture and other industrial training which became a hall mark of the Basel Mission's work in the Gold Coast, and which he notes as among the successes of his time.<sup>36</sup>

Jacobus Capitein chose to glorify slavery, and returned to Africa to lead by that example. He failed miserably. When Capitein returned to the Gold Coast, he was unable to relate to his own people, since the plans he had for the community ran contrary to their way of life. Capitein's failure therefore was due to the lack of inclusiveness with the community he lived in. Even though Capitein and Asante were born into the Akan tribe, they displayed a lack of tolerance for their communities after being converted to Christianity/*Kristosom*. Just like Capitein before him, David Asante chose to take a confrontational attitude towards proponents of the local culture. Asante, who was related to the royal family in his region, was so deliberate in flouting the authority of the chief that the British colonial government intervened to remove him.

Asante's methods, like those of other early missionaries, were not to seek peaceful coexistence, but rather an eradication of culture and a total inculturation of the people of his community. Reindorf on the other hand, was successful in using his Christianity and education to help, by writing books in their language and working within the community. One common thread runs through the lives of all of these missionaries; they became embroiled in the political issues of the times, and factional and local warfare.

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<sup>36</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 46.

## Theophilus Opoku

Theophilus Opoku (1842-July 7, 1913) in 1872 became the first African to be ordained a pastor on Gold Coast soil by the Basel Mission. He was born at Akropong in Akuapem, about 30 mi (48 km) north of Accra, to Yaw Dako, a linguist (chief's spokesman), himself the son of Nana Addo Dankwa, the Omanhene (paramount chief) of Akuapem, and to his wife Korantema. He was a sickly child and was often given up for dead, but recovered his health, and subsequently decided to attend school and become a Christian evangelist. He started school in 1851, when he became the houseboy of the Basel missionary Mader.<sup>37</sup>

He experienced initial difficulty because he considered menial work beneath him, and resented corporal punishment, which he felt should be reserved for slaves. Gradually, however, he accepted the discipline of the religious community, and was baptized in 1856. He entered the Mission's Theological Seminary at Akropong in 1858. The gap between the primary school stage and the seminary had not yet been filled by the grammar school, so that pupils had to make a great effort to learn Greek, Hebrew, theology, and other subjects at a very early age. His studies at the seminary were interrupted by a heart disease which plagued him for several years.<sup>38</sup>

He abandoned his studies and became a teacher at Mamfe, near Akropong, but the disease made it difficult for him to continue teaching, so he was appointed a catechist in 1872, and stationed at Larteh, south of Akropong. The inhabitants there had wanted a white man, and were so disappointed to see an African that they took Opoku back to

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<sup>37</sup>H. W. Debrunner, "A History of Christianity in Ghana, Accra," in *The Origins of Modern African Thought*, ed. R. W. July, (New York: 1967), 1.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Akropong. But he later returned and obtained the necessary cooperation to run the mission station there. He was ordained a pastor on September 1, 1872 by the Rev. J. G. Widmann.<sup>39</sup>

Opoku had married his first wife in 1868, and she had borne him three children, but she died. Opoku was deeply affected by her death, and did not recover until he remarried. His second wife, however, was asthmatic, and this caused him a great anxiety. During his life as a pastor he traveled extensively, penetrating as far as what is now the Northern Region of Ghana in 1877. His diary of events at Salaga, published in the *Christian Messenger* in Basel in 1884, gave vivid details to the life of the "Northerners", (apparently the Gonja), the Muslim religion, and the ravages of the trans-Saharan slave trade in an account which was reminiscent of that written by the German explorer Dr. Gustav Nachtigal (1834-1885) during the same period.<sup>40</sup>

He and his colleague, the Rev. David Asante (q.v.), helped the Rev. J. G. Christaller (q.v.) to translate the Bible into Twi, and his unrivaled knowledge of the Twi language, which he had gained by virtue of his position as the son of the linguist of the Omanhene (paramount chief) contributed greatly to making the Twi Bible a literary masterpiece. On his return from Salaga, he contracted smallpox. During his illness he composed a hymn which was still sung a century later by the Presbyterian congregation in what had become Ghana. In 1877, after his recovery from his illness, he was stationed at Kukurantumi in Akyem Abuakwa. He was transferred to Adukrom, north of Akropong, in 1884, to Mamfe in 1891, and back to Akropong in 1899. He died in 1913.

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<sup>39</sup>Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, Accra, 1.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.



*Independence, freedom, emancipation*

## Chapter 2

### African Traditional Religion

*A person who is in touch with his or her origins is a person who will never die.*

Why is African Traditional Religion (ATR) still in existence?

In the African Traditional Religion, God is outside the pantheon of gods, as He is the eternal Creator of all the other gods and of men and the universe. This makes Him absolutely unique, and He is differentiated from the other gods by having the special name of *Onyame* – the Supreme Being, God the Creator of all things, the Deity.<sup>41</sup> Taking Africa as a whole, there are in reality five component elements that go into the making of African Traditional Religion/*Onyamesom*. These are: belief in God, belief in the divinities; belief in spirit beings; belief in ancestors and the practice of magic and medicine.<sup>42</sup>

God is supreme, and above all, He is the creator and controller of the universe. He is the sovereign ruler of the universe, the king, omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, compassionate, judge, holy and immortal.<sup>43</sup> He still maintains contact with the universe either directly through his personal intervention, or indirectly through his personal

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<sup>41</sup> Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

intermediaries, the divinities and ancestors. God can be approached at all times because He is close enough to hear, and at all stages, man's life depends upon him.<sup>44</sup>

According to Professor Opoku, to call a religion "traditional" is not to refer to it as something of the past; it is only to indicate that it is undergirded by a fundamentally indigenous value system and that it has its own pattern, with its own historical inheritance and tradition from the past.<sup>45</sup>

Divinities are children of God, brought into being during creation, and are next to God. Divinities or traditional gods are thought to be in a father/son relationship with God. They have derived powers, and are functionaries in the theocratic governance of the world. They serve as His ministers, and possess their own divine powers.<sup>46</sup> Acting as intermediaries between God and man, and having divine attributes as natural spirits, they act on and have their temporary dwelling in objects such as rivers, lakes, lagoons, streams, forest groves, mountains, hills, etc.<sup>47</sup>

According to T.N.O Quarcoopome, contrary to the teachings of Christianity and Islam that the divinities are the agents of the devil and therefore rivals of God, the theology of the Traditional Religion teaches that the divinities are the children of God.<sup>48</sup> Since the divinities derive their existence from God, they do not have absolute existence,

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<sup>44</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 70.

<sup>45</sup> Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 9.

<sup>46</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 70.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



unlike the biblical gods (like Baal in the Old Testament) who claim absolute existence. The African divinities are there because God is there; they exist because God exists.<sup>49</sup> Since God may be worshipped indirectly through them, worship is given to these divinities daily, weekly and annually, by traditional priestess in shrines, temples or groves. Divinities can be good or bad spirits, and have the power to appear in any shape, or take the form of an object where they reside, good or bad. We influence the outcome; since we have the image of God in us, we control the outcome with our thought processes, whether positive or negative.

Culture by definition is the pillar on which every society is built. It is the soul and being of the society. It marks the distinctive character of a people, their history, language, socio-economic and political growth and development; their legal and religious affairs are all distinguishing characteristics which mark them from any other society. Any society without its own renowned culture therefore, is empty and dead as wood and dry as dust. For too long since the impact of Western technology and missionary Christianity wrapped in Westernism, many African societies have been living on “borrowed language, borrowed religion and indeed, borrowed culture.”<sup>50</sup>

Thus many of us on the African continent, especially the educated ones and those brought up in strict missionary circles are uprooted from our traditional African culture as best or have become cultural and religious schizophrenics at worst. That is we do not

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<sup>49</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Kofi Appiah-Kubi, “Some West African Initiation Rites and their related Values” in “*The Evangelizing Mission of the Church in West Africa*” ed. H. A. Adigwe, 15-25 (Lagos: AWACC Publication, 1993), 15.

know and appreciate our own cultural heritage and values well enough, or that of the West which we have been brainwashed into believing to be the mark of civilization and spirituality! Upon examination of African tradition religion and culture, one soon realizes that even though they are different depending on whether comparing the East to the North or South to the West; however, there is a very common thread that runs throughout the continent.<sup>51</sup>

As an Akan, I will limit my discussion on Nsaguo to the Akan of Ghana mainly because they are the people I know the best. The Akan are the most dominant ethnic group in Ghana who live predominantly in the Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Central, Western and part of the Eastern Regions in Ghana. Most of the Akan live mainly in the forest except for the Fantis and Nzemas who live by the sea.

According to Dr. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, The Akan evolved a religion connected with the worship of God through nature and religion permeates everything they do. With the introduction of Christianity many Akan have become Christians and Christianity has become the dominant religion. The Akan take little or no distinction between religion and culture and it is very difficult for the average Akan Christian to therefore sever all links with his culture which has religion at its base, and it's the soul of his being. Thus to touch the Akan culture is to tamper with its religious heritage described by foreign observers as pagan.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Appiah-Kubi, *Some West African Initiation Rites and their related Values*, 15.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 17.

There are certain significant rituals and ceremonies with varying degrees of details and intensities that are performed to make different stages of development in the individual's human life. These critical and crucial turning points in one's life are said to be from birth to death. Culture is important for the growth, development and respect of the individual and his community. The Church has not fully appreciated, respected and used the cultural rites and their values in her evangelism; arousing all kinds of reactions, some too extreme, others very compromising and many critical. We acknowledge the transforming nature of our culture as well as Christianity.<sup>53</sup>

African Traditional religion (ATR) like all other world religions seeks to search for the ultimate quest in life that is the ultimate meaning of human existence in order that man's life may be more comprehensible, tolerable and endurable. The context of interpretation of life which must invariably relate to the cultural setting of a particular religious group has been responsible for different modes of expressions and understanding for the objective of human existence.<sup>54</sup>

These various modes of religious expression have produced diversity in the religious phenomena and this coupled with the lack of understanding of ATR, have given rise to the steadfast conviction of the scriptural religions that they are in possession of the absolute truth. Christianity believes that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Similarly, Islam professes that Mohammed is the only true prophet of God, the last and the seal of the great revelations of God to mankind. African Traditional Religion does

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<sup>53</sup>Appiah-Kubi, *Some West African Initiation Rites and their related Values*, 24.

<sup>54</sup>Brigid Sackey, "African Traditional Religions" in *The Evangelizing Mission of the Church in West Africa*, ed. H. A. Adigwe, 124-138 (Lagos: AWACC Publication, 1993), 124.

not seek to challenge or question the validity of this claim, because ATR ensures freedom of religion with the underlying principle that “truth is like a baobab tree, and no one person’s arms can go around it. Therefore in the traditional religious view, the truth is not a monopoly of any single individual; it is a universal phenomenon that must be shared.”<sup>55</sup>

In Africa, there is a diversity of ethnic groups with traditional cultures that differ considerably in many respects from others, each ethnic group has a religion which is bound by particular historical experiences and traditions and is thus restricted to the people among whom it has evolved. There are many differences in the cultures and traditions of African peoples yet in all of this, there are underlying similarities running through African Traditional Cultures which have produced a general pattern of religious beliefs among Africans.<sup>56</sup>

ATR has neither a universal founder nor a propaganda machinery, the beliefs of the people which evolve with time have not been written down or codified as a coherent doctrine, and neither do they exist in a chaotic state. African religious beliefs and practices are systematically embodied in the form of myths, proverbs, gestures, symbols, art, music and dance; transmitted orally from older to younger generations.<sup>57</sup> Contrary to the popular belief that the practitioners of ATR believe in deities, there is the belief that God is the Supreme Being whose name is “Onyame” and there is no plural version of this

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<sup>55</sup>Sackey, *African Traditional Religions*, 124.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 125.

word because the African does not believe that there is more than one Supreme Being. He is Almighty, all powerful, dependable and eternal. The Supreme Being is an invisible spirit whose imminence and presence can be felt everywhere. Non-adherents of ATR especially Europeans have held the erroneous belief that the concept of God in Africa was a borrowed idea.<sup>58</sup>

African Traditional Religion as observed, is built on the concept of tolerance and flexibility. This is seen in the plethora of diverse religious beliefs and practices of African peoples. Adherence to one traditional cult, group or organization does not prohibit a person from joining another.<sup>59</sup> This accommodative behavior, according to Brigid Sackey, has rather contributed to a positive religious growth potential growth of Christianity, Islam and other foreign religions in Africa. Christianity on the other hand is not accommodating in that sense. A Christian is expected to renounce membership of all religion as well as all practices associated with non-Christian beliefs.<sup>60</sup>

However, despite its flexibility, ATR is unyielding to total submission by the invading religions because of the very nature of African culture. African traditional institutions never existed or functioned as distinct separate entities but they are irrevocably and intricately interwoven into one another. Traditional Religion for example never operates independently of the kinship structure or the system of moral values. Therefore encroachment on any aspect of the culture is bound to affect others. This

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<sup>58</sup>Sackey, *African Traditional Religions*, 126.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

fundamental characteristic of African Culture was recognized by Christian Missionaries who thus directed their attacks on crucial aspects of African life. The question is this: why is ATR persistent thriving even after Missionaries had aimed at collapsing it?<sup>61</sup>

### **Beliefs**

Belief in ancestors is the most cognitive central belief in ATR. It is also the focal point of all rituals. When the African uses the word ancestor, he is referring to spirits of members of his family, lineage or society who are dead. These are dead physically only because their spirit are believed to live on and influence society. The dead do not automatically become an ancestor; among the Akan, to become an ancestor, the person must have lived a good life - a life of kindness, generosity, respectful, observing family and ancestors must have had a prolific offspring who would continue the human life process.<sup>62</sup>

The ancestors are of particular significance in their role as custodians of the moral order. The moral order deals with law and prohibitions that safeguard and regulate harmonious relationships in the community. They deal with right and wrong, respect for age, property and life, decency and general mode of acceptable conduct approved by society. In this capacity the ancestors can reward their family members for good conduct with abundant rainfall, crops, children, general prosperity; they punish adverse conduct with drought, famine, barrenness and general unrest. In view of the dual characteristics of the ancestors, there is a general attitude of consciousness of one's conduct that express

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<sup>61</sup>Sackey, *African Traditional Religions*, 130.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. 127-128.

itself in reverent cautiousness towards them.<sup>63</sup> According to Ms. Sackey, there are three main reasons for the persistence and even upsurge of ATR:

1) African religion has deep rooted central belief systems which embody the cultural values of the people and these central belief systems and values are facets of culture which are “least likely to change rapidly in the first instance as compared to such things as mode of economy, dress, food and the like”;

2) ATR is based on the fundamental philosophical principle that no religious doctrines of Christianity contained more similarities than differences with ATR. This fact has also been recognized, though with caution by Rev. Fr. Laroche who stated that: “Admittedly, we must not emphasize too much the similarities between pagan cults and Christianity for that would lead the pagans to that already they are very close to the truth and that their traditional religions differ from Christianity only on secondary points” These similarities are seen in the belief in One Supreme God, Creator and Lord of the Universe and a feeling of dependence on Him together with the realization of the limits of human nature; a belief in the visible and invisible world, the belief in the existence of the human soul that survives after death, a moral order which regulates human conduct.

3) It is said that in the olden days there was no need for uniformed policemen because the ancestors and the gods kept surveillance on the conduct of its members. This belief in the indomitable power of the ancestors still prevails even with the contemporary police and military forces. The story is told that in December of 1986, a casket with the cremated remains of a Ghanaian who died abroad got missing from the Airport, Cargo Section in Accra Ghana. The next day the casket was found at the place where the airplane had stood with a bottle of Schnapps, some mashed yams and eggs as a symbol of repentance and propitiation to the spirit of the dead.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Sackey, *African Traditional Religions*, 128.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

This seeks to emphasize that ATR is a theocentric religion and its aim is to help Africans rediscover the value of their traditional heritage and restructure, their traditional religion that has been shaken and influenced outwardly by Christianity and other foreign elements. The pouring of Nsaguo, ancestral veneration traditional healing, some aspects of initiation rite, are some of the main facets that are being actively revived and practiced.<sup>65</sup>

### Culture

Culture is a sociological concept. It is a way of life, how one thinks, behaves acts and the way one dresses. Culture has been defined in other ways as well; for example Webster's dictionary defines culture in three different ways and the 2<sup>nd</sup>

2) production, development, or improvement of a particular plant, animal, commodity; the 4<sup>th</sup> is as follows: 4 a) development, improvement, or refinement of the intellect, emotions, interests, manners, and taste; b) the result of this; refined ways of thinking, talking and acting; 6 a) the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc of a people or group, that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in or to succeeding generations b) such ideas, customs, etc of a particular people or group in a particular period, civilization c) the particular people or group having such ideas, customs, etc.<sup>66</sup>

Culture will be further defined later to show the correlation between culture and tradition.

My culture therefore has been developed and along the way "improved" upon by my "clan" over the years and the result of that is what I have inherited from my parents.

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<sup>65</sup>Sackey, *African Traditional Religions*, 132.

<sup>66</sup>Webster's Third New World Dictionary. (1988) s.v. "footnote"



## Tradition & Culture

Professor Kofi Asare Opoku, retired professor of African Traditional Religion at Lafayette College in Easton, PA, USA gave the ASANTE-OPOKU-REINDORF MEMORIAL LECTURE, on November 4, 2009 sat the AKROFI-CHRISTALLER INSTITUTE OF MISSION, THEOLOGY AND CULTURE at Akropong – Akuapem, Ghana. Here are some of the excerpts from the speech he gave, quoting indigenous American author John Mohawk:

The reason that indigenous cultural values and religious traditions are devalued in the West is that they are not perceived to be part of the quest for a utopian future. They are not part of the discourse of the West, and do not qualify for serious consideration. These are distinct, unrelated narratives, and, as such, are classified somewhat disparagingly as ‘folk traditions’, not philosophy. They are thought to arise from superstitions, such as the kind Socrates ridiculed. They cannot achieve value because they are structurally devalued in the context of a meta-narrative that seeks to rationalize expansion, hierarchy, colonization, and the objectification of nature, patriarchy, and a long list of other characteristics that define Western culture. Since these indigenous traditions do not support, enhance, or otherwise further the projects of Western domination, they are treated as though they are of no value at all.<sup>67</sup>

But the fate of our invaluable religious traditions cannot be allowed to be determined solely by Western attitudes and interests; these traditions are of inestimable and sacred value not only to indigenous peoples, but also to the whole world; and it is the inescapable responsibility of indigenous peoples themselves to derive meaning and significance from their inherited traditions and take charge of their own destinies by reconstructing value systems for their societies. These values, of course, will not be reconstructed in isolation from the changes that have taken place in indigenous societies as a result of their interactions with others, but their direction must of necessity be determined by traditional values - spiritual, religious and cultural. The indigenous

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<sup>67</sup>John Mohawk, “Tribal Traditions and Western Religious Discourse,” in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, ed. J. K. Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 117.

traditions have not altogether disappeared and continue to inform people's beliefs, attitudes and actions and their persistence and durability provide ample evidence of their relevance.

African Spirituality:

In his Akrofi-Christaller Institute lecture, Opoku further observed that: The religious traditions of our forbears that sustained them throughout the millennia and gave poignant significance and meaning to their lives and satisfied their innermost yearnings for direct experience with the sacred, were an integral part of their “way of life”, or “custom”, or “tradition” – “*amammre*” (Akan); “*kusum*” (Ga); “*konu*” (Ewe); “*asa*” (Yoruba). Their spirituality, which has its source in the invisible, did not stand alone but remained part and parcel of the entire spectrum of their lives.

African spirituality, needless to say, is part of the spiritual heritage of humankind. Born out of the experiences and deep reflections of our African forbears, it provides answers to the stirring questions of the human spirit and to the ultimate questions posed by men and women in Africa. Answers arising out of our own unique experiences in Africa were given to these myriad questions. These answers were by no means fool-proof (are there any fool-proof answers anywhere?), but they satisfied the human quest for meaning and life ceased to be a meaningless journey through the world and became a purposeful enterprise.

These answers of our ancestors were not regarded as the only true answers. Others who gave different answers to the same questions were not regarded as benighted ones, hopeless ignoramuses wallowing in unfathomed and cavernous darkness; nor were

they given names arising from downright disrespect for the “others”, because they held different beliefs.

African wisdom abounds with numerous examples expressive of an attitude of openness or tolerance towards other ways of life and acceptance of differences, making pluralistic existence possible. An African proverb says: “*Truth is like a baobab tree and one person’s arms cannot embrace it*”, thus expressing openness to other forms of spiritual traditions, and making it possible for different religious traditions to coexist harmoniously. This also related to the value of hospitality in the African culture.

Contrary to the assertion that other guest spiritual traditions spread in Africa due to the palpable weakness of the host spiritual traditions, it may be affirmed that the willingness to accept truths outside of one’s own environment or tradition is an expression of strength and maturity rather than weakness. And when the Akan say, “*Nsem nyinaa ne Nyame*” – All truth/wisdom is from God they are intuitively recognizing God as the perpetual and unfailing fountain of truth and wisdom. This understanding of God necessitates openness to receive truth, wisdom and guidance that lie outside the boundaries of their own cultural or religious traditions. Commenting on the characteristic openness of African spirituality, Ali Mazrui said:

Of the three principal legacies of Africa (indigenous, Islamic, and Christian), the most tolerant on record must be the indigenous tradition. One might even argue that Africa did not have religious wars before Christianity and Islam arrived, for indigenous religions were neither Universalist (seeking to convert the whole human race) nor competitive (in bitter rivalry against other creeds)...Like Hinduism and modern Judaism – and unlike Christianity and Islam – indigenous African traditions have not sought to convert the whole of humanity. The Yoruba do not seek to convert the Ibo to the Yoruba religion – or vice versa – and neither the Yoruba nor the Ibo compete with each other for the souls of a third group, such as the Hausa. Because they are not proselytizing religions, indigenous African creeds have not

fought with each other. Over the centuries, Africans have waged many kinds of wars with each other, but they were rarely religious ones before the Universalist creeds arrived.<sup>68</sup>

African spirituality did not marginalize our forbears nor put them outside the pale of divine dispensation, as other forms of spirituality were to do later in the course of African history. There were no “sacred” narratives that portrayed Africans as being defective, flawed from birth and broken, nor were there any stories that could be interpreted to explain the fate of Africans as victims of a divine, primordial curse. On the contrary, African spirituality guaranteed the full and unfettered humanity of African people as indeed of all people, as the Akan proverb eloquently expresses it: “*Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nye asase ba*” – All human beings are the children of God, none is a child of the earth. Or, as the Ewe say: “*Ahloe be kae yedzi, kae yefo tso ati nu?*” – The antelope says, which of my children did I bring forth and which one did I get from the bark of a tree?<sup>69</sup> And it is this absence of any teaching of lack or defectiveness on the part of Africans that enabled our forbears to live full, confident and active lives, as creators of societies and civilizations.

African spirituality is one in which the “divine” or “sacred” realm interpenetrates into the daily lives and experiences of human persons so much that religion, culture and society are imperatively interrelated.<sup>70</sup> Emphasis is placed on the community, from the considered view that individuals receive their humanity from others and that profound

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<sup>68</sup> Ali Mazrui, “Africa and Other Civilizations: Conquest and Counter-Conquest,” in *Religion and Society*, ed. Rose Ure Muzu (Baltimore, Md.: Black Academy Press, 1998), 77.

<sup>69</sup> N. K. Dzobo, *African Proverbs: A Guide to Conduct, Vol. III: The Moral Values of Ewe Proverbs* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2006), 55.

<sup>70</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, (ed). *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions. Volume 3 of World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2000), 88.

and unfathomed personal growth comes to the lives of individuals in the community when they focus more on others than on themselves, and proverbs such as: “*When a thorn gets into the toe, the whole body bends to pull it out*”, or, “*When the leg breaks, the eyes shed tears*”, accentuate this viewpoint.

The community includes the spirit world, the dead, the living and the yet unborn and those who die do not simply disappear, they inhabit the same world in which we find ourselves. Relationships are not limited to humans, for there is interconnectedness between humans and the world around them and this has serious ecological implications.<sup>71</sup>

### **Centrality of the Supreme Being in African Spirituality:**

The Supreme Being or Great Spirit is central to African spirituality. As the Originator or Beginner of all that exists, the Supreme Being is given such names as *Borebore* (Akan), Creator, Originator, Excavator; *Osanobua* (Edo), The Source Being who carries and sustains the universe; *Chineke* (Ibo), Creator; *Orise* (Yoruba), The very Source of Being; *Osa-Nakpame* (Bini), Osa the Great Artist or Arch Moulder, as well as names that describe the Creator’s attributes as Sustainer, such as the Bulu (Cameroon) name, *Mebee*, The One who bears the world, and the Ijaw (Nigeria) name, *Egbesu*, Supreme Protector.

The Supreme Being, who is essentially a spirit and does not have a human or physical form, is likened to the wind by the Akan who say: “If you want to speak to God,

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<sup>71</sup>Opoku, Akrofi Christaller Lectures, November 4, 2009.

speak to the winds”. An Akan drum text expresses the belief that the Great Spirit is the explanation of everything that exists:

*Okwan tware asuo  
Asuo tware okwan,  
Opanyin ne hwan?  
Yetwaa okwan no kotoo asuo no,  
Asuo no firi tete, Odomankoma.*

O Path, thou crossest the River  
O River, thou crossest the Path.  
Which of you is the elder?  
We cut a Path, and it went and met the River,  
The River came forth long, long ago  
It came forth from the Creator of all things.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, paths are made by humans, but rivers and other forms of nature point to *Odomankoma*, the Creator, as their Originator. By merely reflecting on nature and posing questions, the Akan ancestors were led to the conclusion that nature has an Originator, whom they designated as *Odomankoma*. And while there is a clear beginning there is no idea of an end to the world or an end to time, since the Creator sustains the universe.

The Supreme Being is placed in a separate category from other spiritual beings and does not have a generic name like other spiritual beings. In Akan culture, *Onyame* is clearly distinguished from an *obosom*<sup>73</sup> and similarly in Yoruba culture an *orisha* is not the same being as *Olorun*<sup>74</sup>. The Supreme Being is the source of all the other beings in the ontological structure.

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<sup>72</sup> R. S. Rattray, “*Ashanti*” (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 286.

<sup>73</sup> Obosom means deity.

<sup>74</sup> Olorun means God – the owner of the sky (Yoruba of Nigeria).

The absence of temples or shrines specifically set aside for the worship of the Supreme Being is a reflection of the lack of limitations placed on this Being and in like manner, the absence of visual representations also reflects the limitlessness of the Supreme Being. Furthermore, the absence of priests and priestesses, who serve as mouth-pieces, suggests that there is no one with a private extension to God or who can mediate between the people and God. On the contrary, everybody is believed to have a direct link to God by possessing a life principle, called *okra*, *kla* or *aklama* that never dies. The belief in a direct link to God is expressed in the Akan proverb that states: *Obi kwan nsi obi kwan mu* – “no man’s path crosses another man’s path”.

#### African Spirituality and the Concept of Man:

Humans are believed to have been created by the Creator as the many African myths of creation attest. A person is born whole and is believed to be endowed with the potential for right and wrong in his/her consciousness, as the Akan proverb puts it: *Wunyin a, na wunhu; na woye bone de a, wuhu* – “You do not see (notice) yourself growing up, but you definitely know it when you do something wrong”. Archbishop Peter Sarpong underscores this belief when he writes: “The Supreme Being, Creator of heaven and earth, is the universal norm of behavior, the one who tells us what is of value and what is not. It is believed that he has implanted in the human being an inner voice which tells us what is right and wrong, an inner voice that disciplines us, discipline here standing for mental and moral training and systems of rules which enable us to conform to the principles of life”.<sup>75</sup> And, as a child grows up, his/her consciousness will be shaped

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<sup>75</sup> Peter, K. Sarpong, “Cultural Values and Discipline: Character Formation,” in Ben Abdallah (ed). *Culture and Education: Report of the National Conference on Culture and Education* at the Elmina Beach Resort, May 15-21, 2005 (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2009), 94.

by many forces, and a person is good or bad depending on what he or she does, or according to the degree of his/her participation in the affairs of the community, rather than what he/she believes.

Ancestors:

What makes us living human beings is the part of the Creator in us, a divine spark that links every human being directly to God. This is where our real selfhood is rooted, and this part of us is never separated from its source. There is an inward sense of union with a presence that is eternal and that explains African ideas and relationships with the ancestors; for it means that there is something in us that never dies and those who die therefore continue to live and remain members of their families and communities. Hence the interactions between what John Mbiti calls “the living-dead”, with those who are on this plane of life; and life demonstrates certain continuity over the generations. “The dead are not dead”, writes Birago Diop, in his poem *The Dead are Not Dead* quoted in Kofi Asare Opoku’s book<sup>76</sup>, which means that those who are dead are never gone. This belief in the continuity of life gives death a special meaning as an affirmation of the reality and unity of life. We die only to continue to live and to be interacted with by those we have left behind.

African mythology traces the origin of death to the Creator, and death is understood as the natural progression in the stages of life, essentially an entrance into the next stage of life, and not a divine punishment. Among the myths about the origin of

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<sup>76</sup> Opoku *West African Traditional Religion*, 35.



death are some that express the idea that given a choice between immortality and death, human beings chose death.

In an Asante myth from Wonoo, a village near Kumawu in the Asante Region, the Creator created death and when the early humans began to experience the loss of their loved ones through death, they pleaded with God to put a stop to death. Their request was granted. For three years no one died; however, strangely enough, no one gave birth to a child during that time. The people could not bear this situation, and again pleaded with God, this time to grant them the ability to have children even if it meant accepting death also.<sup>77</sup> Thus according to this story, death and birth are complementary; just as death takes away members from the society, birth compensates for the losses death inflicts on the community. In effect, it is death and birth that are opposites, life is constant; and birth can be regarded as the entry gate and death the exit gate through which life passes, only to return again.

#### African Spirituality and Nature:

Our forefathers did not consider a home other than this earth and they therefore endeavored to preserve and maintain it through rituals, taboos and attitudes of reverence for other forms of nature they considered sacred. Their attitude of reverence for nature, later to be condemned as pagan and deserving of the harshest criticisms, reflected a wisdom which is only now being appreciated as salutary in the face of the consequences of the worldwide destruction of the environment, global warming and climate change.

Nature is understood as a living ecosystem with its own power or even spirits, but not all nature is dealt with as spirit, for there are natural causes that are recognized to be

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<sup>77</sup>Opoku *West African Traditional Religion*, 35.

at work in nature. Nevertheless, there is a notion of reality which goes beyond naturalistic explanations. Busia pointed out this particular African epistemology when he wrote:

When the African offers an egg to a tree or food to a dead ancestor, he is not expressing ignorance of material substances, or natural causes, but he is expressing in conduct a theory of reality, namely that behind the visible substance of things lie essences, or powers which constitute their true nature. Those who have read Western philosophy are familiar with such formulations, but because the African does not formulate his problems in terms familiar to the Europeans, or may not even be able to express his awareness in words, his conduct is often grossly misinterpreted. In Western metaphysics, the known world is divided into two, mind and matter, and a human being into soul and body. Some have said that matter alone is real and mind is an illusion; while some now hold that both mind and matter are structures composed of more primitive stuff which is neither mental nor material. The African has not offered learned and divergent disputations to the world in writing, but in his expression in conduct of awe and reverence for nature, no less than in his use of natural resources, he demonstrates his own epistemology. I am not aware of an agreed Christian view of nature, but I submit that there is an African one which is that nature has power which may be revered as well as used for man's benefit.<sup>78</sup>

African spirituality maintains a fundamental relationship between humans and the rest of nature. Humans are part of nature, they are not above it as masters or commanders, and are expected to revere and cooperate with it. As Deepak Chopra wrote: "Thanks to Einstein, we realize that we are embedded in nature... the duality of man and nature is shrinking with each successive generation"<sup>79</sup>. Nature is good without any thought of its being flawed, fallen or defective, as the hawk, in the Akan proverb, flying aloft and beholding the earth below says: *Ade a Onyame yee nyinaa ye* – "All that the Creator created is good".

#### Christianity and the New Spirituality:

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<sup>78</sup>Opoku part of the speech delivered at the Akrofi Christaller Lecture Series.

<sup>79</sup>Deepak Chopra, *The Book of Secrets*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 105.

With the coming of a new form of spirituality represented by Christianity, an ancestral spiritual tradition that had sustained Africans through the millennia, a heritage that had been the source of creativity and inventiveness, suddenly came to be described as demonic and worthy of unhesitating condemnation. The new religion held our ancestral spirituality in undisguised and supercilious contempt, not because it did not provide an understanding of the universe for our ancestors, but because it was different from what the protagonists of the new spirituality regarded as religion. The new religion was regarded as the highest form of evolved religiosity and the possessor of the only truth.

The bearers of the new spirituality spoke with the authority of God and their interpretation of the Bible was used as proof of the veracity of their utterances. Traditional spirituality had to give way to new forms of religion and knowledge of self began to dwindle, for the old identities had little or no place in the new dispensation. This led to the emergence of a new and shallow identity imposed from outside; and the result has been the entrenchment of a negative attitude of Africans towards their own spiritual and cultural heritage, a mortifying imitation and a lamentable lack of originality and reliance on borrowings, and ignoring the ancestral wisdom which warns that “Begged water does not quench thirst.”<sup>80</sup>

The new religion exacerbated some of the divisions in the community. This was very well depicted in Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart”. Our communities had flaws and were not entirely unified. We find some of these flaws in Achebe’s book where we

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<sup>80</sup> Joseph Lule, *The Hidden Wisdom of the Buganda*, (Arlington, Va.: Humboldt and Hartmann, 2006), 162.

read about twin babies being abandoned in the bush because society did not accept them. Albino children were also not accepted in the society. There was a definite class system.

Christians distinguished themselves from pagans on the basis of what they believed and those who became Christians gave up their cultural identities. What people believed became more important than his or her humanity and what was held in common with others in the community. There appeared a division in the community between where Christians lived, *Salem*, and where the pagans lived, usually called *man mu*. Divisions did not end between Christians and pagans, and even continued within the community of Christians: there were Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Seven Day Adventists, and many more.

But that was not all. In the Church there were communicants and non-communicants; those who had fallen (*won a woahwe ase*) and those who were standing upright (*won a wonhwee ase*); those whose corpses were taken into the church and those whose corpses were not taken into the church, before burial; those at whose funerals the pastor was expected to wear his or her full clericals and those at whose funerals the pastor was expected to wear an ordinary suit or dress. These divisions continue to this day and are a marked feature of the new dispensation.

There was an incident that I was involved in, which clearly depicted this trend to me. In 1998 my children and I had moved from the US to Ghana; I needed a break. I soon found out that a very good friend of my late brother had died in Los Angeles and had been flown home to be buried by his parents. Unfortunately, his parents had not been attending church regularly and so did not ‘formerly’ belong to a church.

I was told about this by one of our friends so when I went to church the following Sunday, I approached the Provost of my church “Holy Trinity Cathedral” and informed him about the dilemma. He knew the father of the one who had died and so told me to ask the father to get in touch with him and that the funeral service could be held at the cathedral. The father got in touch and all was arranged. The family was ever so grateful for my intervention.

If you do not belong to a church currently in Ghana, your family will be at a loss as to what to do if you should pass away. There may be a burial site for you but there will not be a church for you unless you have a family member who is affiliated with a church. It never used to be that way. In some towns, the cemeteries belong to the churches so if you do not belong to one then your family would have to find another place to bury you.

#### Negative Attitude towards African Culture and Its Consequences:

A seemingly lasting effect of missionary teaching is the uneasy attitude, nay the fear most African Christians have about their culture and the timorously hesitant approach of the Church to most things African. Robert Rattray commented on the African pupils and converts to Christianity who were:

...quick to see and very ready to follow a trend of thought which denied, or ignored, the possibility of anything useful or good or ethical existing in the African's own religion. The result has been that the cultured and semi-educated African alike (with a few exceptions), when asked about the beliefs of their own people, unconsciously paint them in all the unreal and exotic colors with which their new training and their new environment have taught them to regard them. They feel, and they have been trained to believe that, they are brands plucked from the burning. It is almost impossible that such persons can be sympathetic with their own past, a past which after all few of them have ever really known, seen, or clearly understood.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Rattray, *Ashanti*, 88.

And, as recently as 1999, a primary school teacher and a “devout Christian” at Akropong Akuapem, told an American researcher: “...at first our culture was dirty.”<sup>82</sup>(Coe 2005:93). While most of us may not put it as brusquely as the school teacher did nearly a decade ago, it is still true to say that there are still nagging and paralyzing doubts, inexpressible and haunting fears lurking, insidiously, in the hearts and minds of many of us with regard to the culture and spirituality of our forbears.

This makes us have a low estimate of ourselves as a people, saddled with consuming doubts and tremulous uncertainties about ourselves and our inherited culture, which is the inescapable foundation of anything we can do and accomplish in life. Our ancestors said: *Onifuraefo betow obo abo wo no, na ne nan si obo so* – “Before a blind person can throw a stone at you, he/she must be standing on a stone”. And before we can make any impact on ourselves and others, we must be standing on something as concrete and durable as a rock, and that something is our inherited culture. This is not to suggest, by any stretch of the imagination, that our culture is without blemish; indeed, no culture, however much we may admire and value it, is without blemish. But it is essential for us to uphold and affirm our African cultural identity in order to restore dignity and wholeness to ourselves as a people and to graciously acknowledge the fact that we exist by virtue of God’s own divine purpose and, further, that in our Africanness lies a unique expression of God.<sup>83</sup>

This unwholesome attitude towards our culture also makes us reject our ancestors’ stories about the creation of the world and other foundational tales about

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<sup>82</sup> Cati Coe, *Dilemmas of Culture in African Schools: Youth, Nationalism, and the Transformation of Knowledge* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 93.

<sup>83</sup> Opoku part of the speech delivered at the Akrofi Christaller Lecture Series.

human beginnings that we find in Africa and that we fail to see any abiding spiritual worth in them. Professor Opoku illustrates his point with a story:

An African evangelist confronting a group of people described as “misguided pagans” told them about the truths of his revealed religion. He told them of the creation of the world in six days and of the fall of the first parents of all humans on earth, Adam and Eve, by eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. The deferentially courteous pagans listened attentively to the engagingly buoyant evangelist, and thanked him for his heavenly message. Then one of the elders, believing that good friendship is sharing good things with each other, began to tell the Evangelist how the Creator created the world in four days and how humans were created from clay... And without allowing the old man to complete his story, the obviously indignant and disbelieving Evangelist sternly told the old man that what he had just heard was just a bunch of risible fables and grotesque falsehood, destined to take those who believed such trash to ever-burning hell. The old man, shocked beyond words by the rather uncivil behavior of the Evangelist, simply asked why the Evangelist had refused to listen and credit their stories, whilst they had listened and believed his (inspired by Vine Deloria 2003:84-85).<sup>84</sup>

It is obvious that the Evangelist held on to an absolute paradigm that took precedence over all such stories, and that he held on tenaciously to the conviction that he represented the last word on this matter and failed to appreciate the potential spirituality in the “fables” of the old man. But the old man and his people obviously did not regard their stories of the creation of the earth and man as an absolute historical recording of the creation event and operated from the wisdom implicit in the Ndebele proverb: *The wise man does not claim that what he says is the final word, but the fool insists.*<sup>85</sup>

Another serious consequence of the negative attitude to our culture is the rather unconscious limiting of God’s self-disclosure to a particular religious and cultural tradition and our inability to see our own African soil as an arena of God’s self-disclosure. This amounts to suggesting that God turned God’s back on us here in Africa

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<sup>84</sup>Opoku part of the speech delivered at the Akrofi Christaller Lecture Series.

<sup>85</sup>J. N. Pelling *Ndebele Proverbs and Other Sayings* (Harare: Mambo Press, 1988), 363.

or that God had nothing to do with the past of Africa. This makes us fail to appreciate aspects of our spirituality, such as the visual symbols of spirituality, found in what we call *Adinkra*<sup>86</sup> symbols.<sup>87</sup>

These symbols do not adorn our sanctuaries, with the exception of a few churches, such as the Catholic Cathedral in Kumasi and the Ridge Church in Accra. The reasons why we do not use them are many – either they are of no spiritual or aesthetic value to us in our new dispensation, or we fail to see any spiritual value in them per se, or that we unconsciously feel that they originate from a “pagan” source and are therefore a thundering threat to our Christian sensibilities, or that using them would amount to regressing into unconscionable heathenism, which we abandoned a long time ago, or that it is preferable to decorate our chapels with European symbols which represent enlightenment.<sup>88</sup>

Ignorance may also be part of the problem, because there is the thinking that paganism reigned supreme in Africa before the coming of Christianity and that there cannot be any spiritual insights worth considering by Christians or that Christianity has replaced the old spirituality. These symbols and their potential in enriching a brand of Christianity we could call our own, were therefore ignored and not studied deeply and it

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<sup>86</sup> Adinkra symbols.

<sup>87</sup> Opoku part of the speech delivered at the Akrofi Christaller Lecture Series.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.



amounted to doing what the Akan proverb cautions against: “*Do not throw away the large game bird (you have caught) at the mere sound made by a large antelope*”.<sup>89</sup>

The negative attitude to our culture also breeds dependence and imitation, growing out of the feeling that the Church is not ours and that it was brought here by missionaries and further, that we should hold on firmly and tenaciously to the missionary tradition and present it without adding anything to it. Such thinking necessitates costly imitation, as the Zulu proverb puts it: *Copying everyone else all the time, the monkey one day cut his own throat*.<sup>90</sup>

Borrowing deprives us of the originality with which we can distinguish ourselves as a people. But what we bring to the table remains the critical question for us as Africans. What have we added to what was brought to us or do we feel so destitute that we think we have nothing to add to it? What is implied here is more than dancing and waving handkerchiefs in church!<sup>91</sup>

Reflecting on these matters several years ago, Prof. Opoku wrote:

There is the need to alter past positions and attitudes which regarded Christianity as a closed system of beliefs about a God whose limits had been scaled by Christian thought, and the boundaries of whose self-disclosure were definitely known, especially to Christians. God is the God of all men and His self-disclosure is not confined to a segment of mankind and there are deep insights in other religious heritages which God in His own wisdom has placed there and which can enrich Christian thinking. Such openness should provide a means, not only for expanding knowledge about ourselves, but also

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<sup>89</sup>Opoku, Part of the speech delivered at the Akrofi Christaller Lecture Series

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid..

knowledge which transcends ourselves, and it will be necessary to think afresh about God's activity in human history.<sup>92</sup>

#### The Importance of African Spirituality:

African spirituality is the *sine qua non* of African identity and it buttresses the humanity of Africans, but it has not remained untouched by other spiritualities through time. Since religious and cultural traditions are tied up with African people and their histories, they have undergone many changes. These changes predate Africa's contact with the outside world, but they have been rapid since contact with the external worlds of Islam, Christianity and the introduction of Western education. The spread of Christianity and Islam has been due not only to the "new" things they brought, but also to what may be called "points of convergence" between ancestral spirituality and the new religions and "ancestral spirituality has continued to work in new religions, be it Islam or Christianity."<sup>93</sup>

These new religions have been largely understood and accepted on the basis of traditional spirituality. As the source of life and meaning, African spirituality continues to influence the lives and thoughts of contemporary Africans on the continent as well as millions of African descendants in the Diaspora in the Americas who were involuntarily transported across the Atlantic. These African descendants, who faced cultural genocide, held on to aspects of their spirituality and have succeeded in creating cultural identity and

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<sup>92</sup>Opoku West *African Traditional Religion*, 35.

<sup>93</sup>Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha, African Traditional Religions, in *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions*, ed. Miguel de la Torre, 217-238 (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008), 218.

religious spaces which have become potent instruments in culture formation in the Americas.<sup>94</sup>

In the religions of African provenance in the Americas – Candomble, Macumba and Umbanda in Brazil; Santeria/Regla de Ocha in Cuba and the USA; Vodou in Haiti and the Creole Religions of the Caribbean. Millions of people from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds find meaning and solace in life through their religious practices of African origin and inspiration.

The process of indigenization in the Church is based on the candid assumption that African culture is a viable foundation for the Church in an African setting. The process of indigenization does not amount to the watering down of an otherwise “pure” religion but is an opportunity to transform the Christianity brought to Africa in European vestments by letting it speak to Africans in their experiential and cultural situation.<sup>95</sup>

African Spirituality and Symbols:

In the area of symbols, the Euro-Christian influence still predominates, and our continued reliance on European symbols reflects more of our benumbing poverty than our fervent Christian faith. Our ancestors said: *The one who is dressed in other people's clothes is naked, and the one who is fed on other people's food is hungry.*<sup>96</sup> It is important for us to make sense of all earlier cultural reaching towards God by our forbears and look everywhere for signs of this and make use of them in our new dispensation. This makes it mandatory for us not to ignore our ancestral symbols and

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<sup>94</sup>Opoku, part of the speech delivered at the Akrofi Christaller Lecture Series.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

their intuitive spirituality which will undoubtedly enrich our Christianity, and not, as some of us may think, abominably pollute our “pure” Christianity. The symbol *Gye Nyame*, reflects the omnipotence of God, an unequivocal expression of the greatness and the supreme power of God.

### **GYE NYAME**



#### Destiny

The concept of destiny is widespread in Africa. Every religion has some ideas of a goal towards which adherents must strive, and prescribed modes of thoughts and action. While in some religions there is a tendency to believe that following prescribed rules and regulations brings one to the goal is not to be so approached, even if the rules to be observed are still important.<sup>97</sup>

According to Rev. Kwesi Dickson, African religion and life go together; life is to a very great extent believed to be permeated by religious values. Socialization reinforces the sense of community. There is in the Akan belief that the element that really makes one a human being emanates from the Supreme Being- He therefore gives a person an *kra* or soul and it is the *kra* which really makes one a human being; it is in connection

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<sup>97</sup>Kwesi A. Dickson, *Aspects of Religion and Life in Africa* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977), 3.

with the question of the relation between God and man that the concept of Destiny comes up for consideration.<sup>98</sup>

Time and destiny are brought together in our Festivals. There are two aspects of our traditional festivals that are the recounting of our history and the ceremonies of renewal enacted as part of that festival. It has been said by some that Africans have no sense of history; that of course, is patently false, as the recounting of history at some festival shows.<sup>99</sup>

The Akan Odwira festival and the Ewe Hogbetsotso in Ghana are good examples of the place given to the historical resume on these festive occasions. The history that is recounted is not merely for the purpose of revealing facts about the past. The facts relating to the past are there, but these are recalled in order to ensure future stability. The need to recreate society is enacted in many different ways at festivals, but basically the enactment consists of certain symbolic actions and the verbalization of certain patterns; the intention is, to bring into being a new society, a society without discord and without evil and disease and all that may destroy society's equilibrium.<sup>100</sup> There are also interpretations of history in these festivals.

There is a paradoxical situation where on one hand the renewal ceremonies are meant to take society to an ideal time in the past when presumably society existed in

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<sup>98</sup>Dickson, *Aspects of Religion and Life in Africa*, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 11.

some ideal form; on the other hand, the renewal is meant to ensure a more effective future. Dickson talks about a prayer at the Hogbetsotso Festival which is as follows:

I invoke you all, all the ancestors,  
You who trekked from far away Hogbe  
You who came and founded the State of Anlo,  
You who bore many fruits;  
I make an offering, asking for your guidance;  
We always call on you.  
We plead for peace, perfect peace  
Make evil fly over our heads, and goodness comes to all.  
We ask for peace, let there be rain,  
Let there be rain that peace may reign.  
And in all our chiefs, the little innocent ones,  
All our men, all women, every child of the soil,  
Bless them with unity; let their thoughts and word be one.  
Let the State be one, make it stand as one.  
Drive off evil to the desert beyond River Danyi,  
Drive it off to the deserts beyond the sea,  
To the deserts beyond the lagoon, drive it far away;  
Rest the state in peace, yes in peace, perfect peace.

### **Ancestors**

Who is my ancestor? The concept of ancestor differs from one society to another, according to Archbishop Peter Sarpong; among the Akan, to be an ancestor

1. One must be dead. You cannot have a living ancestor.
2. One must have died a “good” death. One who dies through certain diseases such as leprosy, epilepsy and small pox, cannot be counted among the ancestors. Accidental death through drowning or gunshot is also examples of people who cannot be referred to as an ancestor.
3. One must lead a good irreproachable life. It is those whose lives are worth emulating that are venerated as ancestors.
4. A person must be an adult. One who dies as an infant cannot be remembered as an ancestor.<sup>101</sup>

Among the Akan, it is believed that when good people die, they go to a place of

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<sup>101</sup>Peter Kwasi Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, (Accra-Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 98.

bliss known as Asamando. They do not suffer pain, deformity or any kind of hardship. They lead the life that they were leading on earth in peace. It is the belief that from Asamando, the ancestor can come back to be reborn in order to finish a job he started but could not complete it. The African family/community therefore comprises of the unborn, the living and the dead which is similar to the Church's doctrine of the Church suffering, the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant.<sup>102</sup>

According to Samuel Nichols, ancestors are vital to the African identity and so it would be folly to ignore them. He also states that it is crucial for us to determine the extent to which the African understanding of ancestors is applicable to Jesus Christ and to identify its effects on the expression of our Christianity. Ancestors in the African context are referred to as "the living dead" in the absence of a more precise term. It denotes an idea that death is not annihilation or even a separation. The ancestors are considered as living members of the community. They are responsible for channeling the life force within the community, and thus exert an influence on the vitality of the community. There is a continuity of existence; ancestors are treated as part of the family, although at times they appear fickle and unpredictable and so it is vital that ancestors should not be displeased.<sup>103</sup>

When someone dies, people believe that his spirit which has become an ancestor goes to inhabit a special world of ghosts or spirits. He travels for a certain number of days during which he may have to climb mountains, cross rivers, become tired on the

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<sup>102</sup>Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 98.

<sup>103</sup>Samuel O. Nichols, "African Christian Theology and the Ancestors: Christology, Ecclesiology, Ethics and their Implications beyond Africa," *Journal of African Christian Thought* (Vol. 8, No. 1, June, 2005): 27.

way, and need money, food and water. For that reason when a person is dying, some tribes have the custom of pouring water into his mouth, as the last act of kindness towards him. After his death he is bathed and dressed up in a manner befitting his age and sex. When he is being placed into the coffin, he is accompanied with money, beads, blankets and other precious objects which the people think he may need on his way, or on arrival at his destination.<sup>104</sup>

Ancestors can be sorrowful, for instance, when the living breaks their laws or taboos, but as they are spirits they do not feel the kind of pain which our bodies experience. Even though the living cannot go into the world of the ancestors, they believe that the ancestors keep a close and constant contact with the living members of their lineage. They are sometimes supposed to visit the living. Normally nobody sees them but it is said that certain people possess special powers or medicines by which they can notice their presence of this world. They continue the ties of kithship and kinship even after death. The living are therefore most anxious to keep up good relations with their dead relatives to remember them, to show concern for them, to be one with them and to ask help and favors from them.<sup>105</sup>

The ancestors are said to be custodians and makers of tribal laws. Of the ancestors of the Tallensi of the Upper Region, it is said that they are jealous guardians of the highest moral values. The Ghanaian is constantly preoccupied with the thought that the ancestors are watching him. The preoccupation serves to regulate his daily life and behavior. The ancestors are said to send help to their relatives. One ancestor may

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<sup>104</sup> Nichols, *African Christian Theology and the Ancestors*, 36.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect* (Tema, Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 41.



indicate to one of his own people, the remedy to an illness in his dream. Another may send material things, such as money and clothing.<sup>106</sup>

The Ghanaian does not worship his ancestor as Christians worship God or Muslims, Allah. He venerates them, honors them and respects them and this deferential attitude occupies a big part of his religious life. As an individual, the Ghanaian serves his ancestors privately as well as he can. He remembers them often and when in difficulty or in need, he calls upon them to come to his aid. The ancestor may have been a founder, and able leader. There are special feast days in Ghana which are entirely devoted to the veneration of ancestors. On these days, chiefs must exercise their sacred authority in special commemorative rites to the ancestors even if at times only in private.<sup>107</sup>

Charles Nyamiti posits five categories of ancestral functions:

1. Kinship: African ancestorship can be parental, brotherly, sisterly, and even ethnic;
2. Superhuman status: Thanks to death, an ancestor enjoys certain superhuman capabilities and a sacred relationship to the living kin;
3. Mediation: The African ancestor is frequently, though not always, seen as the mediator between the descendants and the Supreme Being;
4. Modeling an exemplary life: In African culture, no-one can enjoy ancestral status without having led a morally good life;
5. The right to sacred communication: Thanks to familial status, and a superhuman state, the African ancestor is believed to have special entitlement to regular sacred communication with the descendants in the form of prayers and ritual offerings, which signify love, homage, and thanksgiving.<sup>108</sup>

Any study of African ancestral beliefs cannot fail to demonstrate that they – the ancestors are vital to the life of Africans; they are an integral part of their lives. If the church is

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<sup>106</sup>Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 41.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.* 43.

<sup>108</sup>Nichols, *African Christian Theology and the Ancestors*, .27.

true to the gospel and makes a conscious effort to engage with the ancestors as a vital part of African culture, it will not uproot African culture but rather will help to make Africans better human beings and therefore better Africans.<sup>109</sup>

Nana Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III, Paramount Chief of the Akuapem Traditional Area in the Eastern Region of Ghana, in his book on the Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana asks the question: Is Ancestral Worship a Fact? Nana goes on to state that the basic Akan philosophy on the departed is that when a head of family or a chief dies, he supposedly moves to the second degree of his existence within the community. But practitioners of African Traditional religion believe that all people of good moral character do the same and this privilege is not only for heads of families or a King.

In effect, if the head of the family or the chief dies, he is supposed to have “gone to the village”. That means that the ancestor remains a part of the living community. The Akans regard the ancestors still as heads of the families or communities to which they belonged, while they were living human beings. To the Akan, therefore death is not terminal. Since Akans are not supposed to worship anybody within the living community, it follows that the ancestors being part of the community also cannot be worshipped. Ancestor worship is another one of those overdone myths about Africans.<sup>110</sup>

Ancestor worship to me means literally worshipping the dead people which is not the case. The abosom are worshipped even though they are not God. Ancestor worship or veneration is practiced in many different cultures. These practices are not the same as the worship of gods. In these other cultures, the purpose of the ancestor veneration is to

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<sup>109</sup>Nichols, *African Christian Theology and the Ancestors*, 27.

<sup>110</sup>Oseadeyo Addo, Dankwa III, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana: The Future* (Accra, Ghana: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2004), 69.

do one's filial duty. In Korea, ancestor worship is called "jerye" and ancestor altars are called "jesa" and their ancestors are sent off with burnt offerings.

In Northern Philippines there are many wooden images of the ancestors in museums. In Malaysia, Chinese food is offered to the ancestors during the annual Hungry Ghost festival prayers.<sup>111</sup>

In Vietnam, all Vietnamese regardless of their religious denomination have an ancestor altar in their home or business. The death anniversary of a loved one was always an important occasion.

In India, this act is predominant among the Hindu. Tarpan is the ritual where the family offers tributes to the deceased and during these rituals; the family prepares the favorite food items of the deceased and offers the deceased the food. On the day a person died, family members remember them on that particular date with rituals. There is also a celebration of the ancestors called "Pitripaksh" when the family remembers all its ancestors and offers Tarpan to them.<sup>112</sup>

In Europe, traditionally the Celtic and Germanic Europe, the feast of Samhain was specially associated with the deceased. All Saints Day is also known as the Day of the Dead and that was the day that families would go to the cemeteries and light candles for their dead.<sup>113</sup> The Native American Indians also believe in Ancestor veneration; and like Africans, they do not believe that their dead ancestors are dead and gone but believe that they are still with them in spirit.

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<sup>111</sup>Spier, Leslie, *The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition* (Danbury, CT Grolier, 1987), 1.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

Judaism has many rituals during which deceased relatives are remembered. While these practices are not called “ancestor worship,” they are a very important part of Jewish life. In daily prayers, three times a day, the Biblical ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are referred to as a way of reminding God that the Jewish people are worthy of God’s love and attention<sup>114</sup>.

Ancestor worship is the elevation of the ancestors to the level of God, the Supreme Being so I find it hard to accept that I am worshipping my parents or my brother by remembering them through Nsagu. I am a member of the Akan ethnic group; I will be discussing how the Akan view their ancestors. As an Akan, I grew up seeing my parents pour Nsaguo or Nsaguo on particular dates and days. My father, as the “Abusua Payin” or Head of the Clan/Family, had to perform Nsaguo on different occasions. I have come to the conclusion that the people who refer to this act as ancestor worship do not really understand what it stands for.

If one had two parents who loved them when they were alive; that took care of them and protected them, the belief is that they expect the parents to do the same even in death, if the parents have the power to do so. The ancestors are living somewhere between the real world and the spiritual world and the belief is that because their parents and grandparents are living in a different realm, they will use whatever power they have to protect their families/children just as they did when they were alive.

On the birthdays and the anniversary of the death of my parents and my brother, I perform Nsagu in remembrance. Does this mean I am worshipping them? No, I believe that they will take special interest in my affairs and so I ask them to assist me in whatever

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<sup>114</sup> Conversations with Rabbi Jo David.

capacity they can if possible. Not knowing the history and the truth about aspects of the culture is why I am doing this research. I don't know if what I am doing is right but I don't feel I am wrong; I just feel in my heart that I need to do this. I need to learn more about it because it is part of my culture I believe the phrase – “someone turning in their grave” is a saying that came from the Europeans (or was it Africans)? If this saying came from the Europeans, why would they say that if they believe that the souls of their dead are buried and gone? How or why would anyone's parents turn in their graves if they were to see what their family has become and the way they are behaving? Why?

This reminds me of a story that was told by the Krontihene, Chief of Akropong, Nana Kwasi Offei Agyemang about a white man and an Asian who had gone to visit their dead relatives at the cemetery.

The white guy had flowers and the Asian had some food. The white guy sees the Asian putting the food on the grave and he says to the Asian: “Why are you putting food on the grave – do you really believe your dead person will eat this food?” The Asian replied: “For the same reason that you think your dead person will be able to smell the flowers you are putting on their grave”.<sup>115</sup>

According to Philip Bartle, in the Akan Religion, the veneration given to ancestors should be described as “homage” as opposed to worship. Ancestors are spirits that are respected. They are considered to have the power over the ordinary person and are also considered to be a constant presence in all activities that affect the family. Ancestors are not seen as “saints”, they are nevertheless very much respected.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Nana Offei Agyemang Krontihene of Akropong, Akuapem, at the Inauguration of TIDAC – March 20, 2009.

<sup>116</sup> Phillip Bartle, “Akan Studies: Ancestors I; Death & Beyond,”[http:// www.scn.org](http://www.scn.org), 5(accessed July 21, 2010).

According to Professor Opoku, Ancestor Worship was first used by anthropologist Herbert Spencer in his book titled “Principles of Sociology” published in 1885. Spencer’s use of the term arose from his speculation of what went on in what he referred to as “savage” societies. This term, according to Kofi Asare Opoku, was later borrowed by many writers in Africa and applied to practically every exercise of religious belief. The rites performed in connection with the ancestors, such as Nsaguo and the offerings of food to the ancestral spirits are religious acts but not necessarily acts of expression of worship.<sup>117</sup>

According to Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, in Igboland, among those living, the elders are closest to the ancestors and in charge of transmitting their traditions to future generations in order to preserve and perpetuate the heritage and ideas conceived by the ancestors. There are also spiritual, social, and natural forces challenging this order.<sup>118</sup> The influence of ancestral spirits in Africa is very pervasive and devotional concerns over them loom so large in the primal religious structures that emergent religions forms must perforce reflect the encounter with ancestral covenants. Years ago the Senegalese poet Birago Diop observed that in Africa:

Those who are dead are never gone:  
they are there in the thickening shadow.  
The dead are not under the earth:  
they are in the tree that rustles,  
they are in the wood that groans  
they are in the water that runs,

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<sup>117</sup> Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 4-5.

<sup>118</sup> Sabine, Jell-Bahlsen, “The Lake Goddedd, Uhammiri/Ogbuide: The Female Side of the Universe in Igbo Cosmology,” in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meaning and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona, (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 41.

they are in the hut, they are in the crowd,  
the dead are not dead.

Those who are dead are never gone:  
they are in the breast of the woman,  
they are in the child who is wailing  
and in the firebrand that flames.

The dead are not under the earth:  
they are in the fire that is dying,  
they are in the grasses that weep  
they are in the whimpering rocks,  
They are in the forest,  
They are in the house.  
The dead are not dead.<sup>119</sup>

Death is a mere passage from the human world to the spirit world. This passage enhances the spiritual powers so that one could now operate in the human environment and especially in the human family as a guardian, prospective spirit/power/influence. Ancestor beliefs underscore certain social ideals; the vibrant reality of the spiritual world or “an alive universe”, the continuity of life and human relationship beyond death, the unbroken bond of obligation and the seamless web of community.<sup>120</sup>

According to Kofi Asare Opoku, the dead are believed to be everywhere, at any time; they continue to live but in another kind of existence. The reality of their existence constitutes one of the most important features of West African Traditional Religion. The ancestors are always revered and held in high esteem. God is regarded as the Grand Ancestor which makes him an integral part of society.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 35.

<sup>120</sup>Ogbu U. Kalu, “Ancestral Spirituality and Society in Africa,” in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meaning and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona, 54-55 (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 54.

<sup>121</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 35.

Ancestral beliefs underscore the following fundamental West African ideas:

- a) They indicate a strong belief in the continuation of life after death and that the dead continue to live and remain members of their families, clans and societies. Thus human relationships cannot be broken, for not even death can cut off relations with one's relatives.
- b) Ancestral beliefs show that obligation, the basis of African society is unending; for it continues after death, through time. The dead are expected to protect and guard the living, and as it is believed that death increases one's powers, the dead are able to offer more help or assistance.
- c) The ancestral beliefs also give concrete expression to the African idea of community. For them, to be a human being is to belong to a community and to do so is to participate in the rituals, ceremonies and other activities of the community. The ancestors form the supernatural part of the human community in the world. This unseen part of the community is never left out in any communal activity and their participation is always sought. Those who had bad deaths, those who for various reasons are not regarded as members of the revered group of ancestors, are outside the community.
- d) These beliefs also bear evidence of the acceptance of the return of the dead. Reincarnation is an accepted fact.
- e) The ancestral beliefs act as a form of societal control by which the conduct of individuals is regulated. The constant reminder of the good deeds of the ancestors acts as a spur to good conduct on the part of the living; and the belief that the dead can punish those who violate traditionally sanctioned mores acts as a deterrent. Ancestral beliefs represent a powerful source of moral sanction because they affirm the values upon which society is based.<sup>122</sup>

Africans operate with a three dimensional perception of space: the sky, the earth (land and water), and the ancestral or spirit world, which is located under the earth. This can be deduced from funerary rites and the pouring of *Nsaguo* on the ground. But who

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<sup>122</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 38-39.



are our ancestors? An ancestor must have lived a morally good life and must have died of natural causes. Both males and females can be ancestors.<sup>123</sup>

The ancestors play a very important part of Nsaguo. They are seen as intermediaries between the living and God. The patterns and the subject matter of Nsaguo have been described as constituting a liturgy by T.N.O. Quarcoopome. He goes on to state that Nsaguo may be defined as the means of communion and communication with God within the setting of worship.<sup>124</sup>

### **Rituals**

Ritual has a transmission capacity and its communication operates with many sensory modalities. Ritual differs from language in that it neither articulates about the world nor carries opinion about the world. The nearest and closest link people have of the spiritual world is the ancestors. They are believed to be bilingual, speaking the language of men with whom they lived until recently and also that of the spirits and God. Through the ancestors the spirit world becomes generally real to the people.<sup>125</sup>

With their delegated power and authority, the ancestors naturally command awe, fear and respect from the people. As a result great care is taken to ensure that the ancestors get fitting burial. All rituals must be meticulously performed to avoid displeasing them as they would not hesitate to punish with misfortune, any negligence in the performance of these rituals. Similarly, all instructions given by the ancestors before their death with regard to any particular ritual procedure must be faithfully carried out.

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<sup>123</sup> Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 35.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.,

Thus the families pour libation and give food and offerings. The ancestors are also given significant place in rituals at the national level in connection with ancestral cults.<sup>126</sup>



*Nea Onnim no sua a, ohu*  
*“He who does not know can know from learning” symbolizing knowledge, life-long education.*

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<sup>126</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 130-131.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **THE TEST**

*He who is cutting a path does not know the path in his back is crooked.*

#### **Challenge Statement**

Nsaguo is a ritual that seeks to maintain communication between the spirit world and the human worlds in the Akan Culture of Ghana. Some Ghanaian Christians in the Diaspora and some members of the congregation of Bethel Presbyterian Reformed Church believe the practice of Nsaguo is antithetical to Christian belief. This demonstration project will seek to educate and effectively change the attitudes of Ghanaian Christians and others about the meaning of Nsaguo.



*“There is something in the heaven; Lord let me have it”*

### **Preliminary Analysis of the Challenge Statement**

We inherited Christianity from our parents without us giving much thought to what it meant; we did not choose the religion we wanted or what faith to believe in; we were born into it. The Christian religion was a byproduct of colonization by Europe; but the African Traditional Religion is still being practiced in most parts of Africa, today<sup>127</sup>. Traditions existed before Christianity but Christianity is always trying to point out negative aspects of the Tradition. Christianity by way of colonization did not completely take over the culture<sup>128</sup>; however it created some tensions within the traditions and culture of the people and one of the tensions is what I am looking to explore.

I now read the scriptures in a different way – that is, I have to put it in context of my culture and tradition; sometimes asking myself why we have had to succumb to the indoctrination of the missionaries, to the extent that we feel that our culture is inferior and that some of the rituals in our culture are against Christianity much to our detriment. My culture and my consciousness have made me realize the fact that there should be diversity in worship, and in religions. However ultimately, we worship the same God Almighty.

What I realize is that Christianity is one form of worship of God through Jesus Christ, His Son; but when the Muslims claim that Jesus is a prophet just as Mohammed is a prophet, who am I to dispute their beliefs? For Muslims, God does not share divinity with any other being or person. I know through my research that the concept of the Trinity was man-made; in 325, the First Council of Nicaea established the doctrine of the Trinity as orthodoxy and adopted the Nicene Creed, which described Christ as "God of

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<sup>127</sup> Conversations with Professor Opoku – winterim series workshops.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father".<sup>129</sup> The Nicene Creed that we Episcopalians recite every Sunday in Church was created out of the Treaty of Nicaea, and that we all worship the Supreme Being – God Almighty; Nothing bigger than Him.

My interpretation of the scriptures makes me believe that my culture is something that I have to hang onto because that makes me more humane, and can bring my spirituality to appreciate the divine. Jesus' life was a simple one, lacking material wealth. He lived a nomadic life, moving from place to place. People like Mother Teresa, an Albanian, who because of her desire to imitate Jesus Christ moved to India to give of herself in the work that she did. Some practices in our culture are in line with the teachings of Jesus Christ and are similar to the ritual of Asafosa Peace Ritual<sup>130</sup>.

My social class influences my interpretation of my religion's scriptures. I have the opportunity, the ability and the resources to research, understand, and put scripture readings into context. I am able to put readings into perspective, to interpret them and not to take some of these readings literally. I believe that one's level of education gives them the ability to interpret the Bible in a way that others who do not have that high level of education can.

In the United States and Ghana, the poor and the marginalized flock to some of the "charismatic churches" to listen to the interpretation of the scriptures by pastors of these mega churches. The people put the pastors on a high pedestal and some go to

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<sup>129</sup>John Henry Newman., *The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in the Reign of Constantine from Arians of the Fourth century*, <http://www.wikipedia.com> (accessed July 10, 2010).

<sup>130</sup>This is a peace ritual performed by the people of Mamfe, Akuapem in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

church just because of the pastor. Not having the resources for their own interpretation, they rely on the interpretation of the pastor of the church and often accept his or her interpretation as the right answers to most of their problems. The congregation identify with the Pastor who states/interprets the Bible in their own way. The Pastors would also like the congregation to hold the same beliefs that often are to believe it.

The utilization of my Christian scriptures to which I am currently being exposed is influencing my scriptural interpretation. In analyzing my culture, I am able to see how and why Christian missionaries tried hard to eliminate certain aspects of the Tradition and culture. When I read a particular biblical passage, I try to look at it contextually to see whether it is in line with my experiences. This is something I had not been doing in the earlier part of my religious life.

When my sister and I first came to the United States, it was our intent to get a better education and return home after that; back to Ghana. We did not fully assimilate into the American culture – always straddling two continents and not fully belonging to either. Even though I felt more comfortable with my culture because I had lived it before coming to the United States, when I return home, I am looked upon as not being cultural contextually. It was only natural that one would adopt some of the American culture without realizing just how “Americanized” one has become; but the yearning for one’s culture never goes away.

One’s culture is very important because it provides the framework for how one lives. Worshipping as an Anglican which was how I was brought up, gives me some private time to pray and be silent in the presence of God. That is important to me and my scriptural interpretation. My private devotions and my active exploration into finding out

more about African Traditional Religion and the religions of other faiths, has broadened my thinking and understanding of some passages of the Bible and scripture.

I believe that what God demands from me is understanding, appreciation, acceptance, respect and love of others. I believe that God expects me to understand what other faiths are and what their faith is about, and to also accept the fact that not everyone in this world is or ever should be a Christian. Using the tower of Babel as an example, one realizes that we are all God's creatures and have to learn to co-exist with each other. To understand is to have knowledge about humanity and all of us are created for a common destiny. In order to have peace and harmony in our communities, we have to try to understand others and accept their belief systems.

In trying to understand the different faiths, I have to appreciate their belief systems and accept the differences of the various faiths. In the course of my reading the Bible, I know that Judaism existed before Christianity, and Jesus died a Jew. Christianity became a religion after His death; I therefore should be accepting of all people; what I mean is that before I can condemn any religion, I have to understand the history enough to know which aspects of that religion I either accept or reject. I can understand why others do not profess the Christian faith because as I said, some of these religions predate Christianity.

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.  
There are different kinds of working, but the same God  
works all of them in all men.<sup>131</sup> 1 Corinthians 12: 5-6:

According to Reverend Dr. Peter Sarpong, libation<sup>131</sup> is an institution of our forefathers that should not be condemned; he goes on to quote a section of the

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<sup>131</sup>Libation is being used here because of the author. The word Nsaguo has no equivalent in the English language, in terms of the actual act, neither is there an English equivalent of a congregational

instructions that were given in 1659 to the Congregation for the Evangelizing of the Peoples to missionaries bound for China:

Under no circumstances and for no reason whatsoever should you change those people's customs and practices. It is not the culture of Italy or France or Spain that you are bringing but the faith which spurns no culture.<sup>132</sup>

It is rather unfortunate that this accommodating spirit was not carried over to Africa. For example in Nigeria, the missionaries came from a Christian background, and they were convinced that it would be best to have Nigerians converted to Christianity. They, therefore, encouraged their home government not only to send capable administrators to maintain law and order but also zealous Christian missionaries to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. In consequence of this, there was collaboration among the merchants, administrators and the missionaries to suppress the indigenous religion and to impose Christianity.<sup>133</sup>

I am an Anglican/Episcopalian by birth, was baptized when I was a few months old and confirmed in October, 1966. I had been a practicing Anglican/Episcopalian until my arrival in the United States. What I found was that the Episcopalian denomination is similar to the Anglican denomination and so my current denomination is Episcopalian in the US.

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prayer of the Akan religion. When we are talking about the congregational prayer in the Akan religion, the term Nsaguo will be used; however when talking about it in the biblical terms the word "Libation" will be used.

<sup>132</sup> Peter K. Sarpong, *Libation* (Accra, Ghana: Anansesem Publications, Ltd., 1996), 50.

<sup>133</sup> Olupona, *African Traditional Religions*, 112.



My ethnicity has influenced my interpretation of the religion's scriptures. As an African who was brought up within the African/Ghanaian culture, I have learned to appreciate my culture first. Christianity was imposed upon us by our parents and the community without us giving much thought to what it meant; we did not have a choice regarding what religion we wanted to practice. We grew up with Christianity because that was the only way and we became who we are now. When my sister and I came to the United States in 1974, the first thing we did after we were settled was to find a church in our denomination; we felt the need to find an Anglican church because we did not feel whole without a religion. Our culture was also very heavily entrenched in us.

Even though the Christian religion was imposed on us as part of the colonization by the British, the fact that there are still a certain percentage of Ghanaians who still practice the African Traditional religion tells me, as a Ghanaian, that colonization did not completely rob us of our heritage. I now read the scriptures in a different way sometimes asking myself why we have had to succumb to the indoctrination of the missionaries, which to our detriment, and has resulted in our feeling that our culture is inferior and that some of the rituals in our culture are of the devil. My culture and my consciousness have made me realize that there is diversity in worship, and that there is diversity of religions; however, ultimately, we worship the same God Almighty.

Growing up as a Ghanaian, I had the opportunity to see *Nsaguo* at different functions. I was also privileged to see it being performed by my father. Although he was a Christian, he did not see the contradictions in *Nsaguo* as those who claim to be "born again" Christians do. I can still remember the occasions at which my parents would

perform Nsaguo which was on either the anniversary of the death of a loved one or on their birthdays.

To sanctify is to make holy or to set apart as holy<sup>134</sup> and with the advent of “sanctification”, ‘Born Again’<sup>135</sup> Ghanaian Christians who used to accept Nsaguo are no longer participating in this congregational prayer. What I have had people say to me is “If I have Jesus why do I need to pray to anyone else?” Currently, this act has become “evil” and they will not attend ceremonies at which these acts are performed. Some Christians who believe they are born again Christians feel they have received the Holy Spirit and have undergone a metaphysical rebirth, by accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Messiah. The origin of the term “born again” is believed to have come from the New Testament – Specifically in John 3 verse 3 when Jesus said in response to Nicodemus: ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.’ These terms are frequently used by Evangelical, Fundamentalists and Pentecostal churches.

Some Christians perform certain traditional acts during a child naming ceremony but choose to use soft drinks instead of liquor. Others will give the children “soul” names but would opt not to go through the actual child naming ceremony. Some of these actions which to me are “hypocritical” led to the research point of examining what Nsaguo is all about. Why the claim of Nsaguo as evil to society? They adhere to the culture but have turned their backs on the way they lived their lives prior to coming to the United States. Getting involved with charismatic churches has turned a lot of Ghanaians

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<sup>134</sup> Webster’s Third New World Dictionary (1988) s.v. “*footnote*.”

<sup>135</sup> The term “Born Again” was coined based on John 3:3 ‘In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”<sup>[a]</sup>

away from some of the cultural practices. My interest in this particular subject is to find out what the words of Nsaguo rituals are and to investigate why some Ghanaians Christians are against performing this ritual.

### **Ancestors & Saints**

The ancestors are the heroes and heroines of the various tribes. They are believed to have acquired extra-human powers in the afterlife and with these powers they are able to intervene in the lives of the living members of the society. They act as the intermediaries between God/divinities and men. They are the unseen presidents at family or tribal meetings and perform the duties of guardians and policemen of public morality. They may punish those who disobey the norms of the society with diseases, crop failure, etc. At the same time, they reward those who conform to the moral and social orders. Such people secure good health, good harvest etc. The ancestors are venerated and remembered periodically at annual festivals when supplications are made to them to ensure procreation, peace and prosperity.<sup>136</sup>

In an article in the *Journal of African Christian Thought* O. Samuel Nichols has this to say about Saints and Ancestors: The Christian affirmation of the communion of saints finds an echo in the general African belief in the ancestors. The saints belong to the very essence of the church, which is called to be the holy covenant community. In effect, Christ is the basis of sainthood. If the church as the people of God, had no saints, it would not be what it is meant to be – the symbol of God's victory in human history and in the real lives of persons.

The acknowledgement of the saints confirms us in the hope that an exemplary life, based on the values of the society or the church is an achievable goal. The term saint

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<sup>136</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 43.

should include those who have been sanctified by the grace of Christ, whether living or dead, whether Christian or not. The term can also be applied to Moses and the prophets who lived before the time of Christ, but in a manner that anticipated his teaching and example. According to Samuel Nichols, the term could also be applied more widely to non-Christian persons such as Mahatma Gandhi, who were perceived to be holy.<sup>137</sup>

Accordingly, the church should not vilify the Africans who want to express their relationship with the ancestors as one of communion and solidarity. The kinship system of the African people has been utilized by these churches in developing communities of faith where no-one is left without genuine emotional and physical support. One must grant that the ancestors, like the saints, are fellow disciples in the community of disciples. They are not situated between Christ and us; they are with us, in Christ, as sisters and brothers with whom we share a common humanity, a common faith, and a common eternal destiny. The church is a community in itself, and the ancestors are a part – in so far as they lived exemplary lives.<sup>138</sup>

### Ancestors

The ancestors are the souls of the departed heroes and heroines of the various West African tribes. Belief in the ancestors is based on the general notion that life continues after death and that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive here on earth and the deceased.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>Nichols, *African Christian Theology and the Ancestors*, 30.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid, 31.

<sup>139</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 128.

God rarely intervenes in the moral life of men on earth for the most part, according to Benjamin C. Ray; it is the ancestors who act as the official guardians of the social and moral order. Wherever they are found, the ancestors constitute the basic categories of moral and legal thought.<sup>140</sup> This function raises them above the transitory human level and invests them with sacred significance. Superior and powerful, beyond all human challenge, the rights and duties sanctioned by the ancestors both define and regulate basic social and political relations.<sup>141</sup>

The ancestors are moral exemplars in all spheres of life. The ancestors do not, however, govern the whole of the moral order. They govern the narrower sphere of moral obligation. This statement can be refuted by some who believe that some deaths are explained as summons by the ancestors, for the person to explain their conduct on earth. They do not concern themselves with personal moral virtue or with the performance of good deeds but rather with adherence to public norms. In this sense, wicked persons may prosper, even in the eyes of the ancestors, as long as they fulfill the social duties required of them.<sup>142</sup>

Africans should not accept this statement by Benjamin Ray because Africans do not believe that they did not fulfill the social duties required of them –or did they? Many have come to the realization that the Europeans did Africa more harm than good – by

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<sup>140</sup>Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall., Inc. 1976), 146.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid. 147.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

prospering at the Africans' expense – taking a lot of their gold and minerals leaving them poor and dependant on the Europeans for assistance. We believed they had better things for us so we abandoned what we have to follow what they have. We did not know the value of gold globally, so they were able to show us the value and so were able to dictate its use.

Belief in the spirits of the dead and in their influence over the living is found among all peoples, and in every conceivable religion and culture, according to Rev. Peter Sarpong. Christians believe in saints who are only good Christians who are dead and are believed to be in heaven enjoying eternal bliss with their Creator and Father.

Muslim worshippers believe in Mohammed, Isiful and a host of others whose names they impose upon themselves. Belief in ancestors and their veneration therefore are not peculiar to any age, religion or society. It is only the words which are used to describe the dead that differ. When Christians call their dead saints and refer to those of pagans as ancestors, they are not expressing different ideas. Both words express ideas about people who once belonged to their religious groups, are now dead, and are supposed to be in a position of influence over the living.<sup>143</sup>

#### Saints

Christianity, Islam and Judaism have their superstitions as well, but the superstitions in these three religions are not referred to as negatively as the superstitions in African Religion. Every February 2, is Groundhog Day where a groundhog is brought out in Pennsylvania; if the groundhog sees its shadow - there will be 6 more weeks of

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<sup>143</sup>Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, .33.

winter. If it does not see its shadow, spring is around the corner. There is also the belief in rabbit's foot for good luck; or kissing under mistletoe for love.....

The word saint comes from the Greek word "hagios" which means "consecrated to God, holy, sacred, pious." It is almost always used in the plural, "saints." "...Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem" (Acts 9:13). "Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda" (Acts 9:32). "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons ... "(Acts 26:10). There is only one instance of the singular use and that is "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 4:21). In Scripture there are 67 uses of the plural "saints" compared to only one use of the singular word "saint." Even in that one instance, a plurality of saints is in view "...every saint..." (Philippians 4:21).

The idea of the word "saint" is a group of people set apart for the Lord and His kingdom. There are three references referring to godly character of saints; "that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints ..." (Romans 16:2). "For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). "But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Ephesians 5:3).

Therefore, scripturally speaking, the "saints" are part of the body of Christ, Christians, the church. All Christians are considered saints. All Christian are saints...and at the same time are called to be saints. 1 Corinthians 1:2 states it clearly, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy..." The words "sanctified" and "holy" come from the same Greek root as the word that is commonly

translated “saints.” Christians are saints by virtue of their connection with Jesus Christ. Christians are called to be saints, to increasingly allow their daily life to more closely match their position in Christ. This is the Biblical description and calling of the saints.

How does the Roman Catholic understanding of “saints” compare with the Biblical teaching? In Roman Catholic theology, the saints are in Heaven. In the Bible, the saints are on earth. In Roman Catholic teaching, a person does not become a saint unless he/she is “beatified” or “canonized” by the Pope or prominent bishop. In the Bible, everyone who has received Jesus Christ by faith is a saint. In Roman Catholic practice, the saints are revered, prayed to, and in some instances, worshipped. In the Bible, saints are called to revere, worship, and pray to God alone.

In an excerpt from “Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life,” Father Charles Hoffacker writes about Saints:

We seriously err if we equate saints with celebrities. Celebrities, people famous for being famous, appeal to our hungry egos, but leave us spiritually famished. The saints call us to die and rise repeatedly with Christ, to participate in his triumph even as they do. They know where the true bread is to be found, and by their lives properly appreciated, they tell us. Regarding a saint as a celebrity means responding to that holy one with something other than a sense of wonder that includes humility and thankfulness.

The saints draw forth from us a response celebrities are unable to evoke. The saint is both real and transparent, an authentic human being who reflects the divine life. Thus the saints stand as countless reminders that we do not have to be full of ourselves. We can open to God. Humility and thankfulness conspire to make us hopeful.

Such hope does not stop with us. The saints "give us hope that the people we do meet day by day are saints in the making, that the people with whom we worship day by day, week by week,



are the blessing of God in and to the world." So this is a world full of saints in the making. This is a world that, despite our failures, God continues to bless. And God blesses this world not only from on high, but also through human hands and human hearts. The saints are proof of it all. Here is the basis we need for a life of wonder.<sup>144</sup>

## Muslims and Ancestors

According to Jiro Arimi, Vice president of the Japan Muslim Association in an article in the Saudi Gazzette - Honoring One's Ancestors under Islam. Followers of Islam live in an everlasting struggle to accomplish the obligatory deeds demanded of them, and while ancestors are being commemorated, succeeding generations become more conscious of their obligations. He goes on to state that:

Before I discuss the commemoration of ancestors in Islam, I should first touch upon the foundation of the beliefs of its adherents. To a believer, the proof of one's belief is total obedience and devotion to Allah the Absolute. Accordingly, believers look upon the messages (*Ayah*) from Allah the Absolute as the legal standards for their daily lives, and conforming to those standards is the basis for their actions. This is because they are convinced that some time after one's death, although when is yet to be determined, there will come a day (the Day of Judgment) when there will be a deliberation at the entrance to the next world, and the extent to which a believer's accumulated deeds were in line with the messages of Allah will be determined.

While believers may conform to the revelations of the Qur'an, it is their following the example of the practices of the prophet Muhammad (*Sunnah*) with respect to the events that occur in daily life that serves as a more practical moral indicator throughout a believer's life. It is from this standpoint that I will look into matters related to our theme. The funeral prayer *Salat al-Janazah* is recited at services for the deceased. The body is bathed according to the prescribed method and wrapped in a seamless shroud, and it is then transported to a mosque.

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<sup>144</sup> Reprinted from *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*, January/February 2005, Vol. XX, No. 1. Copyright © 2005 by Upper Room Ministries. Used by permission.

After the services have ended, the congregation, in a standing bow, offer memorial prayers (*Dua*) led by the *imam*, and the body is interred. The Prophet has said with regard to attending funerals, "A person who follows a funeral procession and offers the prayer for the deceased shall have a reward of one Qirat, and if he also attends the burial he shall have a reward of two Qirats. A Qirat is as great as Mount Uhud [a mountain in the northern part of Al Madina Province, Saudi Arabia]."

Furthermore, if one hundred of his brethren say prayers of intercession for the deceased, the prayers will be answered. The prayers of intercession of even forty of his brethren will be answered. In other words, according to the tradition Allah's intercession will be granted to the deceased if many believers participate in the funeral. The following is written regarding grieving and wailing for the deceased:

O Believers, protect yourselves and your families against a fire whose fuel is people and stones" (66.6), and "A person who bears a burden (sin) may not bear another's burden. If a person who is burdened calls upon another to bear that burden, not even a portion of it can be borne by the other, not even by a near relative (35.18).

The meaning of these passages from the Qur'an becomes clear when one considers the following *hadith*, which counsels that one must use self-control in coping: "The deceased is punished because of the weeping and lamentations of his family." As to services at the grave after interment, it is written that the Messenger of Allah would say prayers at the grave of the deceased after burial. It is said that he would repeat "*Allahu Akbar* [Allah is great]" four times for the deceased.

As to visiting graves, it is said that in the early period of his mission the prophet Muhammad taught that visits to graves should be avoided. Later, the Prophet counseled visiting graves as a means of confirming that a believer's full life has been lived in this world without regret, so that one can be prepared for the next world. According to tradition, the Prophet said, "I beseeched my Lord for forgiveness for my mother, but he did not grant it. I then asked my Lord if I could visit the grave of my mother. He granted that wish. So all of you should visit graves as well. Truly they will remind you of the dead."

Not only at the burial of the deceased, but also when at a cemetery to visit graves, the following prayers are recited for those in eternal slumber: "May peace be upon you, O you of the house of believers and Muslims" and "May Allah show his mercy upon our ancestors and also upon those in the generations that follow. Allah willing, we will join you." Depending on the sect or faction of Islam, practices for visiting graves will differ, but I believe that in essence it is the relationship between Allah and

his believers that takes precedence over all else. Consequently, although public grieving over the deaths of others or following certain customs that have become general practice may make the everyday world more colorful, this will not assure one's entrance into the next world.

Be that as it may, when the Prophet was asked about the fact that he had wept copious tears when his grandson became critically ill, his response was, "This is because of the compassion that Allah has given to the human heart. Allah is compassionate with those men who have merciful hearts."

As to a forty-day period of mourning in Islam, in many parts of the world this is the established practice. According to one theory, the time that will elapse between the first sounding of the horn, as mentioned in the Qur'an, announcing the hour of the next world when all living things will die, and the second sounding of the horn that will greet their resurrection, will be *forty*. But the *hadith* narrator Abu Huraira, when asked about this oral tradition and whether it would be days, months, or years between the two soundings of the horn, replied, "I can say nothing."

Consideration must be given not just to one's relationship to God, but also to one's immediate family, which is the main pillar of human relationships, and moreover to one's relatives and friends, as well. Although Islam, which entrusts everything to Allah both in this world and after death, does not consider the visiting of graves to be a form of worship, there are certain sects within Islam that observe anniversaries of deaths and hold memorial services the way other religions do; these can better be said to be following local customs.

While observing the usual practice as taught by the Prophet, one must focus one's attention on parents and family as far as possible. The Qur'an says the following about the relationship between parents and children: "Your Lord has decreed this. You shall worship no one but him. Furthermore, be dutiful to your parents. If both or either of your parents reach old age while they are with you, you must not chide them or use harsh language with them. You must also show love and affection to your parents and lower to them the wing of humility, and you should say, 'Lord, please show your mercy to these two who have nurtured me from infancy'(17.23--24).

That is the teaching in the Qur'an regarding the treatment of one's parents. A *hadith* further instructs on filial duty after the death of one's parents:

"O Messenger of Allah! I have been dutiful toward my parents. Are there any duties I owe them after their deaths?' 'Yes, to pray for them, to ask forgiveness for them, to accomplish for them those things that they were not able to accomplish in their lives.

Also, deepen your friendship with those persons to whom your parents had blood ties, and honor the friends of your parents.”

In addition to visiting graves, it is recommended that one carry out obligations to perform meritorious acts on behalf of one's parents that they had left undone. Let us look at one or two examples of performing unfulfilled obligations on behalf of one's parents. The *hadith* speaks about taking someone's place for the duty of fasting and purification, the third obligatory act of the Five Pillars of Islam, in this way: “A woman came to the Messenger of Allah and said, 'My mother has died, but she still had a month's fasting to complete.' And the Prophet said, 'Surely you know that if she had a debt then you must pay it off.' And she said, 'Yes, I know.' 'Carrying out obligatory acts that are owed to Allah takes precedence over performing other obligatory acts.’”

Because the fasting and purification during the period of Ramadan lasts for an entire month, if a blood relative dies during that time, in addition to a parent's debt being paid off any obligatory acts they have left undone must be carried out. If one or both of one's parents depart this world before being able to make a pilgrimage to Makkah [Mecca], which is the fifth duty of the Five Pillars of Islam, even though it was their intention to do so, a substitute may make the pilgrimage on their behalf.

The substitute may carry out this obligation if he or she has completed even one pilgrimage to Makkah. As described above, followers of Islam live in an everlasting struggle to accomplish the obligatory deeds demanded of them (the true meaning of jihad) in an environment that encompasses individuals--parents, family, and close relatives--and furthermore, while ancestors are being commemorated, succeeding generations become more conscious of their obligations. "Every soul shall taste death." (Qur'an 3.185)<sup>145</sup>

Is Nsaguo as discussed in the Bible the same as Nsaguo in the Traditional context? To some Christian proponents of ATR specifically in the Akan culture, ‘libation’ in the Bible can be compared to Nsaguo. Libation in the Bible has a specific meaning in Hebrew religious practice and is regarded as a form of offering to God. The

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<sup>145</sup>Abdus Salam Jiro Arimi ‘Honoring one’s ancestors under Islam” in *Saudi Gazette Internet edition*, Friday, 29 May, 2010

priest uses various kinds of liquids in performing this ritual. Pouring granular substances, such as, sand, powder or grain does not form part of the prayer ritual. This is from a Christian point of view.

Therefore, it is wrong to imply that ‘pouring’ automatically means ‘prayer’. It is this type of imprecise expression that has led to all sorts of confusion about the Akan congregational prayer- *Nsaguo*. *Nsaguo* is the only congregational prayer known in Akan religious observances. It is also performed by individuals as the occasion demands.

### **Communication**

The general belief that communion and communication are possible between the living and the dead is another evidence of the reality of life after death. The ancestors are addressed in much the same way as the living members of the group by their seniors. They are called upon in prayers to reward the living with long life and prosperity. People say that they have had communication with the departed. The ancestors are believed to be capable of influencing the living or good or ill. Thus the ancestors are regarded as part of the social structure and this is manifested in ancestral cults like the Adaye among the Akans. Consequently, before drinking, a person will pour libation onto the ground for the ancestors. Others will put a mouthful of food on the ground before eating and at evening meals, pots are not entirely emptied, nor washed till the next morning, in case the dead comes and finds nothing to eat.<sup>146</sup>

Communication plays an important part in the Adaye festival because talking drums begin to announce the events of the coming day by first calling upon the materials

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<sup>146</sup>Quarcoo, *West African Traditional Religion*, 126.

used in making the drums. They give recognition to them in the drum prelude called the Awakening. The wood of the drum, usually from the cedar tree, is addressed thus:

Wood of the drum, Tweneboa Akwa  
Wood of the drum, Tweneboa Kodua  
Wood of the drum, Kodua Tweneduro,  
Cedar wood, if you have been away,  
I am calling you to come.  
I am learning, let me succeed.<sup>147</sup>

The cedar tree is traditionally believed to have a powerful spirit and the drum, which is made out of it, is identified with the spirit of the wood, hence the invocation by the drummers to the spirit of the wood so that things may proceed as desired.<sup>148</sup>

The drum is a musical percussion instrument belonging to the family of membranophones. Outside of these there are drums with splits or lips. Generally African drums are sculpted from a special tree trunk, which must be blessed with an appropriate ritual which varies according to region and society. Drums play the same role as books and have the same significance for their respective societies. For the Akan, a drum text becomes the standard version of a historical event, of a personality, of an institution, and of fundamental beliefs preserved in the collective memory of the people.

In Black Africa, the talking drum is in fact a precious element of communication. In the highlands, with a favourable direction of the wind, the language of a drum can be heard at a distance of forty kilometres. For the Akan, the drummed documentation is

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<sup>147</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 41.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

serious; it is sacred and respected by the whole population. This is the reason that it is the preferred method of communication with gods, the spirits and the ancestors.<sup>149</sup>

Adae is celebrated by the Akan, twice, every 42 days. Initially, the *Ohene* (*chief/king*) performed the ritual to acknowledge gratitude to, and invoke the continued blessings of, *Nyame (God)*, on the people on *Adae* day. Within the 42-day period, one Adae falls on a Sunday called (Akwasidae) and the other on a Wednesday (Wukudae). At the Adae festival, the ancestral stools are offered food and drink and the chief is the principal officiant representing his people. The Adae festival that is held on Sunday is a bigger occasion than the one that is held on Wednesday because it is usually celebrated as a public feast.<sup>150</sup>

With time, *Nsaguo* became the prayer that is used to invoke the blessing of the Supreme Being at the beginning of every undertaking. The prayer ritual is performed by two individuals; the one who performs the ritual and an assistant, on behalf of all the people present. A lonely individual, in the privacy of his home, can also perform it. The ritual has no known author or a known source of origin. Yet in every Akan community, it is the obligatory duty of the Akan *Ohene*, or in his absence, the *Ohemaa (Queen)*, to perform this ritual prayer on the morning of *Adae* day. This means the ritual is performed every ‘forty-two days’. This duty is so important to the Akan that failure to perform it is enough and sufficient reason for the incumbent to lose his or her privileged and powerful position as *Ohene* or *Ohemaa*.

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<sup>149</sup>Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 83.

<sup>150</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 40.

## Nsaguo

### Nsaguo ceremony

Nsaguo consists of the pouring of the liquid and the invocation of the Supreme Being and the ancestors, which is accompanied by the act of pouring. The procedure is as follows:

1. First, the oldest family member in a family gathering or a chief linguist in an official gathering is asked to pour Nsaguo.
2. He /she asks for a deputy to assist.
3. He asks for the drinks to be used and goes to where the Nsaguo will be poured followed by his entourage and anyone in the community who wishes to observe.
4. If he is a man, he removes anything he may have on his head, lowers his cloth if he is wearing cloth from his shoulders to his middle of his body as if addressing a chief and he also removes his sandals.
5. He then takes in his right hand, a calabash, or a drinking glass and asks his deputy to pour some of the drink into the glass. The deputy may touch the mouth of the bottle to the top of the drinking glass three times before pouring about the drink into the glass to about a third full. Depending on the occasion, he invokes the great spirit of the sky – the Supreme Being Oyankopon, God, Mother Earth (Asaase Yaa) and pours the liquid on the ground. He continues with the invocation of the spirits of the ancestors and the spirits believed to be around us, pouring a little bit of the liquid at the end of each invocation; the group around him responds with each invocation and addresses the reason for the meeting asking for the assistance of God and the ancestors for a fruitful meeting.
6. At the end of the invocation and prayers, he empties the calabash completely on to the ground. The group praises his efforts; he puts his sandals and cloth back on and retires to his original seat. A little bit of liquid is poured out with each invocation; consequently, the number of times the liquid is poured will depend on the number of invocations he has to make.
7. The contents of the Nsaguo prayer/invocation are dependent on the purpose and the occasion.



8. Even though the Nsaguo prayer varies according to the various occasions, the prayers at Nsaguo follow a regular pattern and are in three parts. The first part is the prayer on behalf of the person or persons for whom the occasion is being celebrated. The prayer follows in this format – Calling on God, the national deities, in the case of national festivals, ancestors in family gatherings, town meetings, the names of dead chiefs etc.
9. Secondly comes the reason for the assembly and for the pouring of the Nsaguo. This is followed by the supplication or the petition which has occasioned the pouring of the Nsaguo. Then comes the general prayer for common blessings and favors for all the family members and the community both present and absent.
10. The third part is the conclusion which consists of asking all those addressed at the very beginning of the Nsaguo to receive the drink. Whatever remains of the drink in the calabash is poured onto the ground.<sup>151</sup>

In other words Nsaguo consists of the following – invocation of those to whom the Nsaguo is poured, the announcement of the reason for the Nsaguo, the specific petition or request being made, prayers for general blessings and favors and the conclusion. Generally the petition takes the form of asking for prosperity, increase in population, warding off evil, harm and sudden accidental death and a curse on evil people and the enemies. The actual words are left entirely to the person pouring the Nsaguo.

Men and women alike can perform Nsaguo but it is generally performed by grown-ups. On public occasions, it is usually done by men or linguists or official spokesmen rather than women. The pouring of Nsaguo is considered an honor which is not given to those under the age of puberty.

#### Nsaguo Ritual

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<sup>151</sup> Sarpong, *Libation*, 18.

According to Prof. Kofi Asare Opoku, God is regarded by most West African people as Grand Ancestor or the First Grand Ancestor, a fact which makes him an integral part of society. He is also called Grandfather, a title which is vested with the highest attributes of wisdom, grace and justice. As the Grand Ancestor, he has laid down the most exemplary path for succeeding generations to follow. All those who may be accorded the status of ancestors stand in line with Him as do our Kings and chiefs and heads of various lineages for they all form the hierarchical structure at the top of which is the First Grand Ancestor; thus God is called upon first when *Nsaguo* is being performed.<sup>152</sup>

All over Africa, the Earth is regarded as a spirit, and in the Akan society, she ranks after God and is the second deity to be offered a drink at *Nsaguo*. She is known as *Asaase Yaa* in the Asante and *Asaase Efua* in the Fante. Generally the land cannot be tilled without permission being sought from the Spirit of the Earth. It is firmly believed that all men have emerged from the bowels of the Earth and death is a return to the Earth.<sup>153</sup>

The *Nsaguo* ritual consists of two integral parts, both performed simultaneously by the same individual, in the same place. One part is the prayer said aloud by the person officiating. The other part consists of allowing liquid contained in a drinking glass or calabash held in the right hand of the same person, to drip continually on the ground or objects such as stools or stone. The liquids used for the ritual are liquor, palm wine or

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<sup>152</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 38.

<sup>153</sup>*Ibid*, 56.

water. No liquids other than the aforementioned are used for the ritual. Only one kind of liquid is used at any particular instance.

The description that follows is for a performance in front of a large congregation. Usually, two people are involved, but only one person actually performs the ritual; the other merely assists. For the purpose of clarity and ease of description, the two people participating in the ritual will be Kofi and Yao. Yao will be the principal performer, with Kofi assisting. On Aday day, Yao would be the *Ohene, Ohemaa or Okyeame (linguist)*, and Kofi will be any of the numerous attendants of an Akan king or a palace official or even a relative.

When the ritual is about to begin, Kofi holds the bottle of liquor in his hand. He then opens it in full view of those present. Yao extends his right hand, holding a drinking glass towards Kofi to receive some of the liquor. Kofi brings the bottle, using both hands, holds it over the proffered drinking glass, and tilts it deftly in a swift down and up motions over the glass so that only a small portion of liquor pours into the glass. Kofi repeats his act two more times. By the third time, the glass would be about a third to a half full. The drinking glass, must not be filled in one motion, or filled to overflowing. It is also important that, the act of transferring liquor from the bottle into the drinking glass is done in three separate steps.

When these preliminary and preparatory actions are completed, Yao is about to begin the ritual. Kofi's role, however, is not over yet. He still stands by Yao's side and as Yao performs the ritual, he says '*we-on*' '*we-on*' at intervals. The congregation does nothing; those present are not invited to sit if they are standing, or to stand if they are

seated. Silence is not demanded of the congregation, yet everyone stops talking as soon as they become aware that the prayer has started.

Nsaguo ceremony for a conference/workshop

For this occasion, the person performing the ritual may use liquor or he/she may use water. Water was used to explain the Nsaguo ritual at the October 15 - 17<sup>th</sup> on African Diaspora Leadership Conference as an educational video to be used as a product of this demonstration project. There was a receptacle<sup>154</sup> used into which the water was poured. These were the words of Professor Kofi Asare Opoku as demonstrated at the conference on Saturday October 16, 2010:

I have in my hand a glass/cup full of water.

I am going to perform what is called Nsaguo  
in Akan and Libation in English.

If you are wearing shoes, you should take them  
off because you are in the presence of the elders,  
and you should show respect.

If I were wearing a cloth, I would bare my shoulders  
as a sign of respect, then I would pick up the cup;

First I will lift up the glass with my right hand to the  
heavens and say: God Almighty, here is drink  
*(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

Mother Earth, here is drink *(pour a little bit of the  
liquid into the receptacle).*

Our revered ancestors, here is drink. (I can mention  
them by name by beginning from the immediate dead  
to the furthest I can remember and then I will say, you  
are not trees to be counted so when I call on one, I call  
on all of you. To all of you here is drink.

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<sup>154</sup> A receptacle was used in performing this ritual because it was performed indoors. Usually Mother Earth's drink is poured directly on the ground as well as the ancestors. We offer God a drink we do not give him a drink.

In this ritual that I am performing, I am calling on all our ancestors who have preceded us and the message goes from generation to generation to the first human ancestor who ever lived. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

So in one breathe I am summoning all those who have preceded us here as well as I am calling on all those who will be coming after us. I call on all the beings above and all the beings below.

All those who are very far away and on all those who are very, very close to where I stand and I identify myself by my soul name (Kofi) who is calling on all these realities and ask: What day is it? Today is Saturday and I, your great, great great grandson is standing before an audience of students and pastors, men and women gathered in New York at the New York Theological Seminary and I am calling on all of you to inform you about what we are about to do. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

We are about to hold discussions under the auspices of TIDAC and we are going to be talking about African culture and the relationship between Christianity and culture and other matters. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

May our discussions go well in accordance with your wishes and may all of us benefit from what we are going to learn today. We ask for blessings on every participant and their families – blessings on every nation of the earth, may all of us live in peace and may prosperity and blessings guide us and accompany us throughout our lives. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

If there are others who do not wish us well, please hold them in abeyance; don't let them come near us. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

Blessings on us! Blessings on us! Blessings on us *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

This will be Nsaguo (a libation). When I call on the Creator, God Almighty, and Mother Earth, I call on the two powers on whom we depend on. Then I call on the ancestors, calling and demonstrating the belief that we have in Africa that death does not separate us from our loved ones. To die does not mean to cease to exist. In fact, when we talk about our families, communities and society, we are referring to the part of society that are also not visible. We talk about those who are visible and those who are not visible. Reality has two aspects the visible and the invisible. Reality has two aspects, the visible and the invisible. The Universe has two aspects – the seen and the unseen but everything that exists reflects this reality – a part that is seen and a part that is unseen.

Reality goes beyond our sense experiences. What we see, feel, or touch or smell or taste is not all of reality. It is only a part of reality and those who believe in that which is not seen is not against Christianity. And so we and our ancestors established ways in which they related to reality – seen and unseen. There is not a way of dealing with reality.

A wise person said if the only thing you have is a hammer, you treat everything like a nail. There are some realities in which a hammer is useless. In the presence of realities, you may need an axe or a hoe or a cutlass so our ancestors established different ways of dealing with these realities and the Nsaguo (the libation) I just poured, is one of them. I invited all our ancestors/ realities to be present at the conference today.

#### Words of Nsaguo in a child naming ceremony

The ceremony starts very early in the morning. Close relatives, friends and neighbors come from far and near to participate. Mother and child are clad in white symbolizing victory over death since pregnancy and childbirth are considered serious

rites of passage.<sup>155</sup> The following are the details of the format and words of an Akan Traditional Naming Ceremony. This ceremony is often conducted by the oldest surviving woman in the family.<sup>156</sup>

#### PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Great God of our forebears  
You upon whom we lean without falling  
Accept our offer  
Mother earth who gives us life and takes us  
Back at the evening of our life  
Accept our thanksgiving and offering  
The Gods and Spirits of  
Our mother Africa  
Grant us your ears.  
Spirits and gods of Ghana  
We request your presence  
The gods and spirits of Akan  
Come and share what we offer  
We offer you all we have.  
Nana Yaa Otema  
The great Oak Tree  
That offers shade to all our spring  
We bless your name and offer you drink<sup>157</sup>

Nana Appiah Kubi  
Eno Abena Soaaa Kantanka  
Your son and grandchildren  
Praise and bless your names  
Come and dine with us  
Ancestors and living  
Of the Asona and Aduana clan  
We offer you drink.  
Nana Agyekum Sabraw  
Akurama Nyamaa  
If it is not dark

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<sup>155</sup>Kofi Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans," in *The Evangelizing Mission of The Church in West Africa* ed. H.A. Adigwe, 26-32 (Lagos: AWACC Publication, 1993"), 28.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid

The branching road cannot be missing  
When we call hear us.  
For it is only the parents  
Who know the favorite food of their children  
The whole Asona and Aduana clan and ancestry  
Arise and accept our offer.<sup>158</sup>

#### THE ANNOUNCEMENT

We call on you all today  
Our great and true God, Mother Earth  
Our mother Africa, Ghana,  
Akan and Aduana Busua and  
All the Spirit of the Rivers  
“Epo Abena” (Mother Sea)  
With great thanks and joy<sup>159</sup>

Nana Kwabena Mnyan  
Ena Amma Firempomaa Obaapa, Firempon - Manso  
Yaa Otema-Kromo  
Bretuo Clan  
Be all ears for the good news<sup>160</sup>

Through your kindness, love and grace  
You have blessed the womb of your daughter Akotua  
You have blessed the name and marriage of  
Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Akosua Dedaa  
You have blessed them with a beautiful baby girl  
Though she is their child  
She is also the child  
Of the community of the Dead,  
The living and the yet unborn.

For this reason and many untold blessings  
We offer our prayer of thanks  
And our food and drinks  
We dedicate our entire life to you.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>Appiah-Kubi, “*Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans*”, 29.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.



## DEDICATION

We pray and ask for your blessings  
Grant this child long life and obedience  
Grant her love for her people and all human kind  
Grant her wisdom and understanding  
Let her off - spring be as many  
As the sand of the shore  
Let her roots be as firm as the oak Tree, Odum  
Do not let her be just a passerby  
But rather a permanent member  
Of her society and nation<sup>162</sup>

Bless the Father and the Mother  
Bless the entire family  
Grant them knowledge of understanding  
And good parenthood  
In order that they may bring this  
Child up in the best possible way  
Bless her grandparents.  
Bless all those gathered here today<sup>163</sup>

That they may be the best  
And fruitful teachers of this child  
We ask for peace, love and prosperity  
For our nations, people and all human kind.<sup>164</sup>

## ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CHILD'S NAME

When the elders has counsel  
With the ancestors  
They unanimously agreed that  
The name of the child is  
(*name of the child*)<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans, 30.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

Now friends, brothers and sisters  
From today on, you are  
All witnesses  
That the name of this child is  
*(name of the child)*  
Let all of you and the world  
Know that this child  
Has no other name but this.<sup>166</sup>

#### RITUAL OF COMMITMENT (SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS)

##### WATER

Now *(name of the child)*  
Drink this water  
This is the fountain of life  
You shall always be  
The fountain of Life  
To your parents, family and nation

##### WINE

Accept this drink  
You shall be as sweet as wine  
And all your offspring  
Shall be as sweet as wine<sup>167</sup>

##### SALT

Take this salt  
Accept this and become  
A living soul.  
Be as honest as the taste of the elements  
When you say it is water or then wine or salt  
It is truly water, wine or salt.

You are the salt of Africa and humankind  
Always remember that a meaningless life  
Is like food without salt.  
So let your life be a shining example

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<sup>166</sup> Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans, 31.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

To all African people and humankind  
Be faithful in all you say and do  
Be honest to yourself  
To all people living, dead and yet unborn  
Have a peaceful, long and fruitful life.<sup>168</sup>

RITUAL OF BLESSINGS AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE  
CHILD AMONG THE LIVING

*(name of the child)*  
(Mother and Father shall accompany  
The leader with the child)  
Let the blessing of the Great God  
Ancestors, the Spirits of the living.  
The Dead and the unborn  
Be upon our child.

*(name of the child)*  
We all welcome you with love  
Into our community  
Come and strengthen the love and respect  
For our mother and father  
Come and strengthen us all  
We wish you a long and  
Prosperous life.

And now *(name of the child)*  
Whoever will make you suffer  
Or your parents, family and people suffer  
Because of jealousy, prejudice  
Or any other unfounded reasons  
Let his/her evil thoughts and acts be revealed  
To our True and only God  
Our Ancestors and Spirits,  
Our warriors, and elders

The Living and the Dead  
And the yet unborn  
And let him/her suffer  
From his/her wickedness.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans" 31.

The Ohum festival is another occasion where Nsaguo is performed. Different towns celebrate their different festivals at different times of the year depending on historical events. This is an occasion where the ancestors play an important role in the lives of the people.

### Ohum Festival

Okyeman is a traditional area in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Historically, it has been attested that the Akyems were one of the first Akan tribes to migrate southwards after the fall of the ancient Songhai Empire. The Akyems, according to history were a part of the then all powerful Adansi Kingdom, The Adansis were known for their ability to build illustrious structures in their kingdom; hence the name "ADANSI" (Builders). The powerful Ashanti Kingdom emerged and under the leadership of Nana Osei Tutu and, during the ascendancy of their empire fought and defeated the Adansis in about the 14th Century and absorbed the Adansi Kingdom into the growing Ashanti Kingdom. The Akyem nations which were then part of the warrior class Adansi Kingdom, broke away and crossed the River Pra to settle on its banks to avoid being absorbed into the Ashanti Empire who they considered enemies.<sup>170</sup>

Nana Osei Tutu chose to pursue the Akyem across the River Pra to teach them a lesson and, to attempt to further build the Ashanti and expand its influence. That was a big mistake by an otherwise illustrious king of the all powerful Ashanti who were known for their mastery of the art of war and, cerebral style of fighting. While crossing the river

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<sup>169</sup> Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans", 31.

<sup>170</sup> en.[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adansi](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adansi)

with his army, he was killed by elite forces from the Akyems who were camping out on the other side of the river. He fell dead into the river. This was on a Thursday; this brought forth, the great oath of the Ashantis, ("Meka Yawada"- I swear by Thursday). For this, the Akyems who carried out this defeat became known as "Abuakwanfo" or "Abuakwafo" (Guerrilla Fighters).<sup>171</sup>

The Ashantis in a rare loss retreated and this tragedy made it a taboo for any Ashanti King up to the time of Nana Prempeh I (circa 1900) to cross the River Pra to the south except their armies. After the battle the Akyem moved southeastwards. As a result of this movement, some of the Akyems, especially the Kotokus, settled in the present day Ashanti-Akyem area. The majority of the Akyems, however, continued to move southeastwards and settled in several areas along the way until they came into contact with the Akwamu, who were one of the most powerful nations in the sub region with influences spanning modern day Ghana, Togo and Benin.

The Aday festival is by far the most important festivals in honor of the ancestors, according to His Grace Rev. Peter Sarpong. They are days set aside for the remembrance of the late rulers, to honor them, pour Nsaguo to them, give them something to eat and ask for their favors and blessings.<sup>172</sup>

The Odwira a national festival is celebrated in specific towns and cities such as Wenchi, Kibi, Akwamufie, Akropong-Akuapem and Kumasi. This festival lasts for an entire week. The Odwira is an annual ceremony held in September in honor of the

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<sup>171</sup>Appiah-Kubi, *Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans*, 30.

<sup>172</sup>Peter Sarpong, *The Sacred Stools of the Akan* (Ghana: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1971), 56.

departed Akan Kings and for the purification of the whole nation.<sup>173</sup> The Odwira (purification) is a very important festival during which the whole state, symbolized by the stools, is purified of all its evils. The first stool to be purified is the "Great Paramount Stool" followed by the other stools, one after the other, until all the stools in the state have been purified. In Akyem Abuakwa, the Okyeman Council has decided that the celebration of Odwira Kese should be at intervals of 5 or 10 years as the Paramount stool and the Okyeman Council may decide. However, the Akuapemhene and the Amanokromhene, who took the Odwira festival to Akuapem, celebrate it annually in Akuapem with the Okyenhene or his representative attending. Every year, unless decided by the Okyenhene and the Okyeman Council to celebrate it as "*Odwira Kese*", the festival is celebrated as an ordinary (Mpaegum) with no fanfare.

The festival is celebrated twice a year in Akyem (Abuakwa Traditional area) of Ghana. These are known as OhumKan and OhumKyire and celebrated in June/July and September/ October respectively. The festival marks the anniversary of the Akyem Nation: celebrating the ancestral stools and the spirits of those who formerly occupied them. The celebration is also to mark the first harvest (yam) of the year and to ask for blessings for the coming year.<sup>174</sup>

The duration of the festival is 2 days (Tuesday – Wednesday). Two weeks before the festival, a ban is placed on drumming, dancing and noise making. Monday preceding the Tuesday, home the first harvest of the year and to have plenty of food in the house for

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<sup>173</sup>Sarpong, *The Sacred Stools of the Akan*, 66.

<sup>174</sup>[www.ghanaexpeditions.com](http://www.ghanaexpeditions.com).

the duration of the celebrations.<sup>175</sup> This ceremony of thanksgiving to God is the great festival of the Akyem people known as Ohum festival. The Ohum festival is celebrated in Akyem Abuakwa in two parts; the Ohumkan and the Ohumkyire

However, when it is declared as an "Odwira Kese", all the chiefs in Akyem Abuakwa in their respective positions and paraphernalia, including the Akuapemhene and the Amanokromhene, are invited to attend the festival and pay homage to the Paramount Stool at Kyebi. The term "Odwira" means purification of the state at the end of the Akan calendar year. During the celebration, digging and farming are prohibited. The celebration takes a week with various activities taking place each day, and on the final day, the Okyenhene sits in state to receive homage from his chiefs and people, as well as from firms and organizations in and outside Akyem Abuakwa state.

#### The Asafosa Peace Ritual

The Asafosa Ritual for Peace in the Mamfe Township predates the introduction of Christianity. It is part of the Ohum festival of Akuapem in the Eastern Region. The Asafosa Peace Ritual is closely tied to the history of Mamfe Township, in the Akuapem District in the Eastern Region of Ghana, West Africa. According to oral tradition, the people of Mamfe used to live at Damurukuso, located near present day Obosomase in the Akuapem District in 1511. In those days, the people of Mamfe were farmers who lived in the forest and could easily be killed by wild animals. There was a lack of water at their location. The hunters of the tribe would go far and wide to search for water, because sometimes they would bring in a kill, but lack water with which to cook it.

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<sup>175</sup>[www.ghanaexpeditions.com](http://www.ghanaexpeditions.com).

The Asamoah family were said to be expert hunters, and it was during one of their hunting expeditions from Damurukuso that they saw rivers and streams flowing from a big rock – water in abundance -- in the area. They returned often, and soon realized that the rivers and streams in the area flowed continuously. They discovered other sources of water not far from the original discovery, and when they realized that the soil was good for farming, they decided to inform the other four families about what they had found. The heads of the other families, namely Kwadwo Toku, Abe, Agyarko and Akote decided to go and see the land for themselves prior to making the decision to move. After visiting the location, they agreed with Asamoah that it would be better to relocate.

After discussion with their families, five of the families decided to move and make a home at the new location. The five families that settled at the present day Mamfe Township were Kwadwo Toku, Abe, Asamoah, Agyarko and Akote. They never went back to Damurukuso. The five families parceled out lands for each other, settling not too far from each other, but far enough to feel separate. Each farmer and his family lived in a particular area and farmed the land, but shared the use of essentials such as water and grazing land. By the end of the first year, they realized that they had made a good choice, and therefore called the area Kwaade, and the name has remained till today.

In order to live in harmony, the heads of the five families decided to set aside a specific time to settle disputes that had arisen between individuals as well as families, during the first year of their settlement.

On an appointed day, the head of each family was requested to bring a pot of palm wine to a meeting for sharing. To demonstrate that no one bore any ill will toward another, they poured the drinks they had brought in one common pot, and each of the five



family heads drank portions of the mixed wine. The remainder was then shared among the members of the five families, accompanied by merry making, to symbolize the togetherness of the families. Every year, they met to socialize and discuss what had happened to their families within the past year, to settle any disputes between clans, sharing sympathy with those who had lost members of their families, and to celebrate any good news. Every clan head would bring palm wine – a local wine made from the sap of the palm nut tree. After all disputes were settled, everyone would share the drinks they had brought together and would also share festivities together. This demonstration of togetherness was called “ASAFOSA NOM DA.” The name means clan drinking day, or the day of communal drinking.<sup>176</sup>

The chief of Mamfe used the Asafosa Ritual, celebrated by the community in December/January, as an example of an African Tradition which is not understood by some Christians. The Chief explained that the ritual, which is part of the Ohum festival of Akuapem, occurs at the latter part of the festival and it is to bring the community together. The Ritual is for peace, prosperity, and continuity in the community.

This tradition continued for several years. At every meeting, some of the hunters began to report seeing an apparition: a very tall man with a big white dog standing in front of him. The man held a staff in his hand, but did not harm the people. Several hunters reported seeing this apparition at many meetings, until a daughter of one of the families became possessed by the spirit of the apparition. The spirit said that his name was Kwadwo Topré, and that he was a spirit, not a god. He desired peace and justice, and did not like blood. If the people who had settled on his land kept the peace, he would

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<sup>176</sup>The brochure of the Mamfe Ohum Festival 2007 & the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Enstoolment of Osabarima Ansah Sasraku III, 23.

protect them and make sure no harm came to them. It was said that when someone became very ill, Topré would appear and put his hand on the person, who would then immediately recover. They began to revere him. Those who became possessed by the spirit of Topré were called Akomfo, and they lived to serve him. The people also built a house for the priest of Topré.

The priest of Topré would take the palm wine from the heads of the clans and pour it into the communal pot. The priest would then mix the drinks together, and taking the first cup of the mixed palm wine, he would pray to *Onyankopong* – God -- and through Topré, ask for protection for the people, as well as peace, prosperity, happiness, long life and good health. After the prayers, the priest would put the mixed wine in the pots of the different clan heads and every member of the clan was to take a drink. This would go on until all the wine in the cauldron was finished.

Through the *obosom*, Topré would warn the people of misfortune, and tell them how to prevent it, so the people of Mamfe grew prosperous. There were a lot of inter-marriages between the original five families, and the community grew. There was a yearly ritual for Topré as well. Prior the Asafosa Peace Ritual, the elders of the town would go to the farm to prepare special wine, and bring offerings to Topré of yams, cocoyam, plantains, tomatoes, drinks, and firewood.

The Topré Okomfo would perform the necessary rites before the Asafosa Peace Ritual and in so doing; they would be silent participants during the ritual. Every year, as they celebrated the festival, the ritual would conclude the celebration. The festival continues every year to this day, and as the community has grown, so has the community pot, which is now similar to a large cauldron. A clan that had not been able to settle all

disputes within their family could not partake of the Asafosa Peace Ritual, unless it was understood that by participating in the Peace Ritual the dispute was at an end, and could never be discussed again. By partaking of the ritual, all was forgotten and forgiven.

Prior to the Peace Ritual, there were certain rituals that had to be performed by Topre's priest. For three weeks before the ritual, there was to be no drumming, no unnecessary noise and no misbehaving. The priest and his elders would go to the farm and as they went, they would form a line, and no one could cross the line. If you happened to be going to the farm around the same time, you would have to wait until every single one of the entourage had passed. When they were returning to the village, they also formed one line, led by the priest of Topré. No one was allowed to look back; if you did, you may not live to see the next year.

From there, they went directly for Topré's house, to meet and receive gifts. After receiving the gifts, they went to their homes to bathe, and then returned to the house to begin the ritual. The sub-chiefs would meet first and wait for the chief, who is called *Osabarima*. When *Osabarima* was seated, the APR would begin and *Osabarima* would call the heads of the families to pour their wine into the cauldron. The order of the families was as follows:

- 1) The Mankradohene
- 2) The Gyasehene
- 3) The Enyiresihene
- 4) The Ponehene
- 5) The Tufuhene

The *Osabarima* was the last to bring his wine to the pot. The Asamoah family did not participate in the bringing of the wine, but did participate in the drinking because they were seen as the ones who had brought the Mamfe family to that settlement. The *Osabarima* mixed the drink, and gave the heads of the families the drink from the communal pot. After the priest had prayed for the township, everyone drank the wine, just as it is done in Holy Communion. The priests of Topré became the chiefs or *Osabarima* of Mamfe, because they understood the spirit of the community and its protector, similar to the part played by church ministers today. If a clan could not resolve an issue prior to the APR, they would go to the priests for resolution. It was a disgrace to the clan and the families involved if they could not participate in the APR, and so heads of the families would make sure that their disputes were resolved beforehand. Everyone was invited to partake in the APR, including children.

#### The Current Celebration of the Asafosa Peace Ritual

The schedule of the festival started on Sunday, and continued for the rest of the week.

**Monday** was a day of mourning for the dearly departed of the previous year, and so visits were made to all who had experienced death in their family.

**Tuesday** was a day for feasting. Each family would cook meals and share them with friends and relatives.

**Wednesday and Thursday** were set aside to discuss issues of development that would enhance the well-being of all families, while the merry-making continued.

**Friday** was a day of communal labor.

**Saturday** was the day of the Durbar, when the chief and elders would sit in state.

**Sunday** was a day for a non-denominational thanksgiving service.

According to the chief (Osabarima) the APR started in the 1600s, before arrival of Christianity in Africa, and is still celebrated today. Ordained Christian ministers are invited to the APR, and although some ministers, due to their personal beliefs, choose not to attend, there is always a minister who is ready and willing to participate. No one has said that Christians are not welcome to participate in the APR. To the Mamfe people, Topré was a manifestation of the power of God. Topré cannot be used for evil, and can never be used to curse anyone. The festivities surrounding the APR are known as the *OHUM* Festival of Mamfe, Akuapem.

The present Mamfe is made up of the following clans:

Descendants of Agyarko	– Awurade Kese	- Chiefs of Mamfe
Descendants of Kwadwo Toku	– Awurade Ketewa	- Chiefs of Gyase
Descendants of Akote	- Pone	- Chiefs of Mankrado
Descendants of Abe	- Enyiresi	- Chiefs of Enyirensi
Descendants of Asamoah	- Akyeremade	- Chiefs of Kwahu <sup>177</sup>

The people of Mamfe realized that they needed guidance in their community and so they sought the protection of an intercessor/ancestor spirit to help them achieve this tranquility throughout the year. This yearly ritual is part of the festival which starts in the second week of January and lasts about four days, and people from the community living elsewhere come from far and wide to celebrate. The actual festival celebration starts

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<sup>177</sup>The brochure of the Mamfe Ohum Festival 2007 & the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Enstoolment of Osabarima Ansah Sasraku III, 24.

from Thursday and culminates with the Asafosa Ritual on Sunday.<sup>178</sup> The ritual follows this pattern:

A large community pot is set in front of the chief's palace. Starting from Thursday, the heads of all the family clans of Mamfe bring pots of "palm wine", a local drink tapped from the palm tree, and pour the wine into the community pot. However, if there is a feud within the clan/family, they have to settle that dispute/feud before participating in the Asafosa Ritual. If the feud is not settled in time, they will not be able to participate in the Ritual<sup>179</sup>.

In Matthew 5: 23-24, Jesus said:

So when you are offering your gift at the altar,  
if you remember that your brother or sister has  
something against you, leave your gift there  
before the altar and go first be reconciled to  
your brother and sister, and then come and  
offer your gift.....

There seem to be other rituals and sacraments in the Bible that parallel African rituals. According to Kofi Asare Opoku through Nsaguo, contact is established between the spiritual and the human, material or physical world. But who says there is only one way of doing so?

Nsaguo expresses the African belief that the dead are not dead and that the dead continue to live as members of their families/communities and that the living can communicate with them. Since death does not terminate human relationships, the dead,

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<sup>178</sup> As told by the Mamfe Chief and his elders at Mamfe in an interview in April, 2008.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

who are members of their families/communities, are invited through Nsaguo, to come and participate in the on-going activities/events in the families/communities. The dead ancestors live close to God/Supreme Being and function as our intermediaries; and since they have lived here on earth before, they understand our problems and can relay them to God/Supreme Being, and that is why we call on them during Nsagu.<sup>180</sup>

The prayers in Nsaguo are meant to pass through them to God/Supreme Being. When some people start performing Nsaguo they say and I quote: "Osor nsa! (the Sky have a drink) Asase nsa! (Mother Earth have a drink)". By saying so, they are calling on the heavens and the earth or earth and sky, the two great fructifying forces in the universe which come together to sustain human life on earth. What is wrong in acknowledging our dependence on these great forces that sustain our life on planet earth? Nsaguo is also an act of remembrance and sharing. Through it the living share food and drink with the dead. Why should we forget our dead simply because we have been converted to Christianity?

As stated before, Nsaguo is performed at all functions in the Akan society. I will closely examine the differences between Nsaguo in the Bible and Nsaguo and seek to understand if the proponents of the culture are right when they say that the two are not the same. It is also performed at different functions such as child naming, marriages, funerals and any occasion where there will be a large gathering. In my demonstration project, the Nsaguo Ritual, which is a form of Akan congregational prayer at several social events in the society and the subsequent activities to demonstrate how this ritual is performed?

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<sup>180</sup> Winterim lectures with Professor Opoku.

The words of the Nsaguo prayers have to be written down carefully and analyzed because of the different occasions involved; to establish a better understanding of Nsaguo for society. The occasions for Nsaguo are always not the same; there is a different prayer for different occasions. Ordained ministers who do not have any problem with Nsaguo will be interviewed to have a better of Nsaguo and why they do not have a problem with the ritual. My hope is that with the examination of this ritual, I can and will educate myself, my fellow Ghanaians Christians, my brothers and sisters of the African American heritage as well as people of other cultures who are interested in understanding the ritual of Nsaguo.

### Prayer

According to the Akan, Nsaguo is a congregational prayer – a communication between the living and the spirit world. Some of the issues that some born- again Christians have with Nsaguo is that the words used when performing Nsaguo, is to curse their enemies and ask that evil befall them. According to Rev. Peter Sarpong, as a form of prayer, Nsaguo is performed to the Supreme Being, the deities and the ancestors. The deities and ancestors in Nsaguo, has offended many. Many have used the deities for evil. Some Christians have therefore described it as superstition and an unacceptable form of worship.<sup>181</sup>

Prayer forms a very important part of every religion and its role in African Traditional Religion cannot be refuted. Prayer is a form of communication a cry of help from a person to a higher power when they are in need of assistance. When Christians pray, they are trying to communicate with God. Through prayer, a religious person seeks

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<sup>181</sup>Sarpong , *Libation*, vii.



communion with the divine. The religious person calls on the higher being and feels that he experiences the higher being's presence with him. Prayer therefore seeks to establish a link between the human person and God.<sup>182</sup>

Prayer shows that human beings are dependent upon beings higher than themselves; hence human beings pray for security, long life, good health, children, blessings, success in life, in time of calamity, during epidemics. Thus the ultimate aim of prayer is to make oneself complete by being one with the spiritual overlords in the hope that they will satisfy one's needs.<sup>183</sup> Prayer can also be used to ask the higher beings to bring mayhem on one's enemies.

Prayer is offered at any time when the need arises; on formal occasions, prayer is offered when there is special worship or when there is a ceremony such as the naming of a child, the Enstoolment of a chief, or any official ceremony, including a durbar. There is no special time set aside for informal prayer; prayer is offered as much during the day as during the night, in the morning and in the evening. However, the form that a prayer takes may be stereotyped or improvised to suit a particular occasion.<sup>184</sup>

Prayer is significant and of great importance to Africans because it brings them together and helps to patch up differences that may exist among them. Prayer is meant to link the human being to the Supreme Being so that the human being knows that he or she has a protector, a father, who will deliver him or her from problems. Prayer demonstrates that our people believe and rely on supernatural beings whose lives are thought to form

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<sup>182</sup>Sarpong, *Libation*., 1.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid, 5.

part of our lives. Psychologically, prayer helps one to overcome fears, anxieties, worries, frustrations and disappointments. It gives the individual as much as the community, a sense of security.<sup>185</sup>

The patterns and the subject matter of Nsaguo have been described as constituting a liturgy by T.N.O. Quarcoopome. He goes on to state that Nsaguo may be defined as the means of communion and communication with God within the setting of worship. According to Quarcoopome, the main elements of liturgy in Traditional religion are invocation, the pouring of libation and prayers and offerings.<sup>186</sup>

An Akan libation prayer for example begins with a tribute to God, and in the prayers that follow the libation, the needs of the worshippers are expressed and the divine being sought to satisfy them. From African liturgies, we learn about the names and attributes of God and the divinities, the absolute trust and hopes the people have in him, the ability of God and his deputies to supply the needs of man and the fact of the general relationship between God and man.<sup>187</sup>

Here is a Nsaguo prayer by the Igbo people of Nigeria:

Pouring of Libation by Ezeogo Edda at Nguzu, Ebonyi State in Nigeria

Nigeria greetings!  
Edda greetings!  
Ebonyi greetings  
Nguzu greetings

Our ancestral father Chima we greet you  
We present our guests to you  
They have come to bring development to Nguzu

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<sup>185</sup> Sarpong, *Libation*, 8.

<sup>186</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 35.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 36-37.

Let this not be a visit of broken promises  
Rather let it be fruitful

We pray for the safe return of our guests.  
May Edda benefit from this development!  
And prosper like other communities  
Our forefathers' pleas accept this drink

They have accepted the drink!  
(Everyone cheers)

### Prayers of Nsaguo and the Christian Psalms of Imprecation

To the Christians who say that the words of an Nsaguo prayer contains curses to their enemies, I would like to compare a few of the psalms of David that Christians use in church every Sunday and the words of the Nsaguo prayers. When one reads the psalms of imprecation, it is quite obvious that when King David, the author of these Psalms felt that he was in trouble, he did ask God to curse his enemies. There are several Psalms that ask God to punish his enemies. The following Psalms show that Christians are not averse to asking God to punish their enemies:

Psalms 35, v: 4-28

- <sup>4</sup> May those who seek my life  
be disgraced and put to shame;  
may those who plot my ruin  
be turned back in dismay.
- <sup>5</sup> May they be like chaff before the wind,  
with the angel of the LORD driving them away;
- <sup>6</sup> may their path be dark and slippery,  
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.
- <sup>7</sup> Since they hid their net for me without cause  
and without cause dug a pit for me,
- <sup>8</sup> may ruin overtake them by surprise—  
may the net they hid entangle them,  
may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.

- <sup>9</sup> Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD  
and delight in his salvation.
- <sup>10</sup> My whole being will exclaim,  
"Who is like you, O LORD ?  
You rescue the poor from those too strong for them,  
the poor and needy from those who rob them."
- <sup>11</sup> Ruthless witnesses come forward;  
they question me on things I know nothing about.
- <sup>12</sup> They repay me evil for good  
and leave my soul forlorn.
- <sup>13</sup> Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth  
and humbled myself with fasting.  
When my prayers returned to me unanswered,
- <sup>14</sup> I went about mourning  
as though for my friend or brother.  
I bowed my head in grief  
as though weeping for my mother.
- <sup>15</sup> But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee;  
attackers gathered against me when I was unaware.  
They slandered me without ceasing.
- <sup>16</sup> Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked <sup>[b]</sup> ;  
they gnashed their teeth at me.
- <sup>17</sup> O Lord, how long will you look on?  
Rescue my life from their ravages,  
my precious life from these lions.
- <sup>18</sup> I will give you thanks in the great assembly;  
among throngs of people I will praise you.
- <sup>19</sup> Let not those gloat over me  
who are my enemies without cause;  
let not those who hate me without reason  
maliciously wink the eye.
- <sup>20</sup> They do not speak peaceably,  
but devise false accusations  
against those who live quietly in the land.

- <sup>21</sup> They gape at me and say, "Aha! Aha!  
With our own eyes we have seen it."
- <sup>22</sup> O LORD, you have seen this; be not silent.  
Do not be far from me, O Lord.
- <sup>23</sup> Awake, and rise to my defense!  
Contend for me, my God and Lord.
- <sup>24</sup> Vindicate me in your righteousness, O LORD my God;  
do not let them gloat over me.
- <sup>25</sup> Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!"  
or say, "We have swallowed him up."
- <sup>26</sup> May all who gloat over my distress  
be put to shame and confusion;  
may all who exalt themselves over me  
be clothed with shame and disgrace.
- <sup>27</sup> May those who delight in my vindication  
shout for joy and gladness;  
may they always say, "The LORD be exalted,  
who delights in the well-being of his servant."
- <sup>28</sup> My tongue will speak of your righteousness  
and of your praises all day long.

## **Psalm 55**

- <sup>1</sup> Listen to my prayer, O God,  
do not ignore my plea;
- <sup>2</sup> hear me and answer me.  
My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught
- <sup>3</sup> at the voice of the enemy,  
at the stares of the wicked;  
for they bring down suffering upon me  
and revile me in their anger.
- <sup>4</sup> My heart is in anguish within me;  
the terrors of death assail me.
- <sup>5</sup> Fear and trembling have beset me;  
horror has overwhelmed me.

- <sup>6</sup> I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest-
- <sup>7</sup> I would flee far away  
and stay in the desert;  
Selah
- <sup>8</sup> I would hurry to my place of shelter,  
far from the tempest and storm."
- <sup>9</sup> Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech,  
for I see violence and strife in the city.
- <sup>10</sup> Day and night they prowl about on its walls;  
malice and abuse are within it.
- <sup>11</sup> Destructive forces are at work in the city;  
threats and lies never leave its streets.
- <sup>12</sup> If an enemy were insulting me,  
I could endure it;  
if a foe were raising himself against me,  
I could hide from him.
- <sup>13</sup> But it is you, a man like myself,  
my companion, my close friend,
- <sup>14</sup> with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship  
as we walked with the throng at the house of God.
- <sup>15</sup> Let death take my enemies by surprise;  
let them go down alive to the grave, <sup>[b]</sup>  
for evil finds lodging among them.
- <sup>16</sup> But I call to God,  
and the LORD saves me.
- <sup>17</sup> Evening, morning and noon  
I cry out in distress,  
and he hears my voice.
- <sup>18</sup> He ransoms me unharmed  
from the battle waged against me,  
even though many oppose me.

- <sup>19</sup> God, who is enthroned forever,  
will hear them and afflict them—  
Selah  
men who never change their ways  
and have no fear of God.
- <sup>20</sup> My companion attacks his friends;  
he violates his covenant.
- <sup>21</sup> His speech is smooth as butter,  
yet war is in his heart;  
his words are more soothing than oil,  
yet they are drawn swords.
- <sup>22</sup> Cast your cares on the LORD  
and he will sustain you;  
he will never let the righteous fall.
- <sup>23</sup> But you, O God, will bring down the wicked  
into the pit of corruption;  
bloodthirsty and deceitful men  
will not live out half their days.  
But as for me, I trust in you.

### **Psalm 58**

- <sup>1</sup> Do you rulers indeed speak justly?  
Do you judge uprightly among men?
- <sup>2</sup> No, in your heart you devise injustice,  
and your hands mete out violence on the earth.
- <sup>3</sup> Even from birth the wicked go astray;  
from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.
- <sup>4</sup> Their venom is like the venom of a snake,  
like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears,
- <sup>5</sup> that will not heed the tune of the charmer,  
however skillful the enchanter may be.
- <sup>6</sup> Break the teeth in their mouths, O God;  
tear out, O LORD, the fangs of the lions!
- <sup>7</sup> Let them vanish like water that flows away;  
when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted.

- <sup>8</sup> Like a slug melting away as it moves along,  
like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun.
- <sup>9</sup> Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns—  
whether they be green or dry—the wicked will be swept away. <sup>[b]</sup>
- <sup>10</sup> The righteous will be glad when they are avenged,  
when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked.
- <sup>11</sup> Then men will say,  
"Surely the righteous still are rewarded;  
surely there is a God who judges the earth."

### **Psalm 59**

*When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him. <sup>[a]</sup>*

- <sup>1</sup> Deliver me from my enemies, O God;  
protect me from those who rise up against me.
- <sup>2</sup> Deliver me from evildoers  
and save me from bloodthirsty men.
- <sup>3</sup> See how they lie in wait for me!  
Fierce men conspire against me  
for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD.
- <sup>4</sup> I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me.  
Arise to help me; look on my plight!
- <sup>5</sup> O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel,  
rouse yourself to punish all the nations;  
show no mercy to wicked traitors.  
Selah
- <sup>6</sup> They return at evening,  
snarling like dogs,  
and prowl about the city.
- <sup>7</sup> See what they spew from their mouths—  
they spew out swords from their lips,  
and they say, "Who can hear us?"
- <sup>8</sup> But you, O LORD, laugh at them;  
you scoff at all those nations.



<sup>9</sup> O my Strength, I watch for you;  
you, O God, are my fortress, <sup>10</sup> my loving God.  
God will go before me  
and will let me gloat over those who slander me.

<sup>11</sup> But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, <sup>[b]</sup>  
or my people will forget.  
In your might make them wander about,  
and bring them down.

<sup>12</sup> For the sins of their mouths,  
for the words of their lips,  
let them be caught in their pride.  
For the curses and lies they utter,

<sup>13</sup> consume them in wrath,  
consume them till they are no more.  
Then it will be known to the ends of the earth  
that God rules over Jacob.  
Selah

<sup>14</sup> They return at evening,  
snarling like dogs,  
and prowl about the city.

<sup>15</sup> They wander about for food  
and howl if not satisfied.

<sup>16</sup> But I will sing of your strength,  
in the morning I will sing of your love;  
for you are my fortress,  
my refuge in times of trouble.

<sup>17</sup> O my Strength, I sing praise to you;  
you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

## **Psalm 69**

<sup>1</sup> Save me, O God,  
for the waters have come up to my neck.

<sup>2</sup> I sink in the miry depths,  
where there is no foothold.  
I have come into the deep waters;  
the floods engulf me.

- <sup>3</sup> I am worn out calling for help;  
my throat is parched.  
My eyes fail,  
looking for my God.
- <sup>4</sup> Those who hate me without reason  
outnumber the hairs of my head;  
many are my enemies without cause,  
those who seek to destroy me.  
I am forced to restore  
what I did not steal.
- <sup>5</sup> You know my folly, O God;  
my guilt is not hidden from you.
- <sup>6</sup> May those who hope in you  
not be disgraced because of me,  
O Lord, the LORD Almighty;  
may those who seek you  
not be put to shame because of me,  
O God of Israel.
- <sup>7</sup> For I endure scorn for your sake,  
and shame covers my face.
- <sup>8</sup> I am a stranger to my brothers,  
an alien to my own mother's sons;
- <sup>9</sup> for zeal for your house consumes me,  
and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.
- <sup>10</sup> When I weep and fast,  
I must endure scorn;
- <sup>11</sup> when I put on sackcloth,  
people make sport of me.
- <sup>12</sup> Those who sit at the gate mock me,  
and I am the song of the drunkards.
- <sup>13</sup> But I pray to you, O LORD,  
in the time of your favor;  
in your great love, O God,  
answer me with your sure salvation.

- <sup>14</sup> Rescue me from the mire,  
do not let me sink;  
deliver me from those who hate me,  
from the deep waters.
- <sup>15</sup> Do not let the floodwaters engulf me  
or the depths swallow me up  
or the pit close its mouth over me.
- <sup>16</sup> Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love;  
in your great mercy turn to me.
- <sup>17</sup> Do not hide your face from your servant;  
answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.
- <sup>18</sup> Come near and rescue me;  
redeem me because of my foes.
- <sup>19</sup> You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed;  
all my enemies are before you.
- <sup>20</sup> Scorn has broken my heart  
and has left me helpless;  
I looked for sympathy, but there was none,  
for comforters, but I found none.
- <sup>21</sup> They put gall in my food  
and gave me vinegar for my thirst.
- <sup>22</sup> May the table set before them become a snare;  
may it become retribution and <sup>[a]</sup> a trap.
- <sup>23</sup> May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,  
and their backs be bent forever.
- <sup>24</sup> Pour out your wrath on them;  
let your fierce anger overtake them.
- <sup>25</sup> May their place be deserted;  
let there be no one to dwell in their tents.
- <sup>26</sup> For they persecute those you wound  
and talk about the pain of those you hurt.
- <sup>27</sup> Charge them with crime upon crime;  
do not let them share in your salvation.

- <sup>28</sup> May they be blotted out of the book of life  
and not be listed with the righteous.
- <sup>29</sup> I am in pain and distress;  
may your salvation, O God, protect me.
- <sup>30</sup> I will praise God's name in song  
and glorify him with thanksgiving.
- <sup>31</sup> This will please the LORD more than an ox,  
more than a bull with its horns and hoofs.
- <sup>32</sup> The poor will see and be glad—  
you who seek God, may your hearts live!
- <sup>33</sup> The LORD hears the needy  
and does not despise his captive people.
- <sup>34</sup> Let heaven and earth praise him,  
the seas and all that move in them,
- <sup>35</sup> for God will save Zion  
and rebuild the cities of Judah.  
Then people will settle there and possess it;
- <sup>36</sup> the children of his servants will inherit it,  
and those who love his name will dwell there.

## **Psalm 70**

- <sup>1</sup> Hasten, O God, to save me;  
O LORD, come quickly to help me.
- <sup>2</sup> May those who seek my life  
be put to shame and confusion;  
may all who desire my ruin  
be turned back in disgrace.
- <sup>3</sup> May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!"  
turn back because of their shame.
- <sup>4</sup> But may all who seek you  
rejoice and be glad in you;  
may those who love your salvation always say,  
"Let God be exalted!"

<sup>5</sup> Yet I am poor and needy;  
come quickly to me, O God.  
You are my help and my deliverer;  
O LORD, do not delay.

### **Psalm 109**

<sup>1</sup> O God, whom I praise,  
do not remain silent,

<sup>2</sup> for wicked and deceitful men  
have opened their mouths against me;  
they have spoken against me with lying tongues.

<sup>3</sup> With words of hatred they surround me;  
they attack me without cause.

<sup>4</sup> In return for my friendship they accuse me,  
but I am a man of prayer.

<sup>5</sup> They repay me evil for good,  
and hatred for my friendship.

<sup>6</sup> Appoint <sup>[a]</sup> an evil man <sup>[b]</sup> to oppose him;  
let an accuser <sup>[c]</sup> stand at his right hand.

<sup>7</sup> When he is tried, let him be found guilty,  
and may his prayers condemn him.

<sup>8</sup> May his days be few;  
may another take his place of leadership.

<sup>9</sup> May his children be fatherless  
and his wife a widow.

<sup>10</sup> May his children be wandering beggars;  
may they be driven <sup>[d]</sup> from their ruined homes.

<sup>11</sup> May a creditor seize all he has;  
may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor.

<sup>12</sup> May no one extend kindness to him  
or take pity on his fatherless children.

<sup>13</sup> May his descendants be cut off,  
their names blotted out from the next generation.

- <sup>14</sup> May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD;  
may the sin of his mother never be blotted out.
- <sup>15</sup> May their sins always remain before the LORD,  
that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth.
- <sup>16</sup> For he never thought of doing a kindness,  
but hounded to death the poor  
and the needy and the brokenhearted.
- <sup>17</sup> He loved to pronounce a curse—  
may it <sup>[e]</sup> come on him;  
he found no pleasure in blessing—  
may it be <sup>[f]</sup> far from him.
- <sup>18</sup> He wore cursing as his garment;  
it entered into his body like water,  
into his bones like oil.
- <sup>19</sup> May it be like a cloak wrapped about him,  
like a belt tied forever around him.
- <sup>20</sup> May this be the LORD's payment to my accusers,  
to those who speak evil of me.
- <sup>21</sup> But you, O Sovereign LORD,  
deal well with me for your name's sake;  
out of the goodness of your love, deliver me.
- <sup>22</sup> For I am poor and needy,  
and my heart is wounded within me.
- <sup>23</sup> I fade away like an evening shadow;  
I am shaken off like a locust.
- <sup>24</sup> My knees give way from fasting;  
my body is thin and gaunt.
- <sup>25</sup> I am an object of scorn to my accusers;  
when they see me, they shake their heads.
- <sup>26</sup> Help me, O LORD my God;  
save me in accordance with your love.
- <sup>27</sup> Let them know that it is your hand,  
that you, O LORD, have done it.

- <sup>28</sup> They may curse, but you will bless;  
when they attack they will be put to shame,  
but your servant will rejoice.
- <sup>29</sup> My accusers will be clothed with disgrace  
and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.
- <sup>30</sup> With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD;  
in the great throng I will praise him.
- <sup>31</sup> For he stands at the right hand of the needy one,  
to save his life from those who condemn him.

### **Psalm 120**

- <sup>1</sup> I call on the LORD in my distress,  
and he answers me.
- <sup>2</sup> Save me, O LORD, from lying lips  
and from deceitful tongues.
- <sup>3</sup> What will he do to you,  
and what more besides, O deceitful tongue?
- <sup>4</sup> He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows,  
with burning coals of the broom tree.
- <sup>5</sup> Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech,  
that I live among the tents of Kedar!
- <sup>6</sup> Too long have I lived  
among those who hate peace.
- <sup>7</sup> I am a man of peace;  
but when I speak, they are for war.

Here is an example of what is said during the performance of Nsaguo by the Ewe

Hogbetsotso

I invoke you all, all the ancestors,  
You who trekked from far away Hogbe  
You who came and founded the State of Anlo,  
You who bore many fruits;  
I make an offering, asking for your guidance;  
We always call on you.

We plead for peace, perfect peace  
Make evil fly over our heads, and goodness comes to all.  
We ask for peace, let there be rain,  
Let there be rain that peace may reign.  
And in all our chiefs, the little innocent ones,  
All our men, all women, every child of the soil,  
Bless them with unity; let their thoughts and word be one.  
Let the State be one, make it stand as one.  
Drive off evil to the desert beyond River Danyi,  
Drive it off to the deserts beyond the sea,  
To the deserts beyond the lagoon, drive it far away;  
Rest the state in peace, yes in peace, perfect peace.

The reason why I wanted to research into the words spoken during the performance of Nsaguo is that negative connotations have been attributed to the words of the Nsaguo performance, without a thorough examination of what is being said. As a Ghanaian Christian, when I go to different activities such as a funeral, I do not really pay attention to the words being said by the person performing the ritual; but now in doing this research, what I have realized is that the one who is performing the ritual can choose to say what he/she wants to say.

#### Proverbs in ATR and in the Bible

Ever since I started on this quest, I have always missed my parents. I miss my mother especially because there are so many questions I would like to ask her about everything that is going on in my life now. There are so many things that I need clarification on that I would have loved to have asked her. But I was not so sure that she was well versed in some of these rituals and customs. Imagine my surprise when my younger brother told me that in her spare time, my mum had started compiling proverbs. Proverb I said? – All excited – yes – he stated in her own writing. When I saw her writing it brought tears to my eyes. This was just what I had been looking for. Surely this was a sign that I was on the right path?



As my advisor Professor Opoku always says: *Enye nyenko na ye nam*, meaning we are not alone in this world. It was as if my mother was giving me her blessing from the grave. I never knew that my mother and brother were collaborating on putting together proverbs for publication. This gave me an immense pleasure and satisfaction while at the same time a great deal of sadness because I miss her and I know that she would have endorsed this project wholeheartedly. This was a sign of approval from her – prodding my brother to let me know what they had been working on – which he had put aside. See Appendix 15.

A proverb may be defined as a short, well known saying, expressing a truth or pointing out a moral. African utterances are full of proverbs which reveal a lot about African religious beliefs.<sup>188</sup> As Prof. Opoku so aptly stated, speech is palatable only when it is interspersed with proverbs. *A proverb is the horse which can carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas.*<sup>189</sup>

According to Prof. Opoku, morality and religion in African societies are connected and may be found in proverbs and everyday saying of the people. Most of the important virtues are either couched in proverbs or expressed in the form of a folk-tale with a moral to it. The proverbs may serve as prescriptions for action or an act as judgment in times of moral lapses. Often a proverb, cited at an appropriate time during an argument, can settle the dispute instantly, for the proverbs are believed to have been

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<sup>188</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 31.

<sup>189</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku, *Speak To The Winds* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co. 1975), 11.

handed down by the ancestors and predecessors to whom we owe our communal experience and wisdom.<sup>190</sup>

A proverb my mother always used to say is: *Oba nyansafo wo bu nu be won ka na asam* – *You always speak to a wise child with proverbs and not plain language.*

In this section, I will try and compare some African/Ghanaian proverbs that have been said of old but have similar sayings in the Bible. What makes it so special is that a lot of these sayings have been orally handed down by people who have never read the Bible. What I have realized is that these proverbs were derived from experiences. A proverb my mother used to say to us is: *Obiara aye abfra da; nye obiara na wa ye payin da. Everyone comes into this world as a baby but not everyone grows up to be an adult. Experience equals wisdom*

Consider this – Proverbs 22:1 – A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches and favor is better than silver or gold. Akan proverb: Good name is better than riches. As my mother puts it – *Enyime ayawa nnse medzin* - *If you will not sing my praises, don't mess up my name.*

(Proverbs 16:1) To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue.

(Proverbs 16:9) In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

(Proverbs 19:21) Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

(Proverbs 20:24) A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?

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<sup>190</sup> Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 38-39.

(Proverbs 21:30) There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD.

(Proverbs 21:31) The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD.

– The Mamprusi<sup>191</sup> of Ghana will say: A mortal owns the saying and God owns the fulfillment

**Proverbs 16:18** – Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall

– Pride comes before the fall – from the Builsa<sup>192</sup> of Ghana and “Self Elevation precedes one’s downfall – from the Ewe of Ghana.

African proverbs: “The freedom that comes from ignorance enslaves the one who entertains it”.<sup>193</sup>

“Experience is the mother of knowledge”<sup>194</sup>

“Knowledge is like a garden, if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested”<sup>195</sup>

“Wisdom is not in the head of one person”<sup>196</sup>

An Akan drum text expresses the belief that the Great Spirit is the explanation of everything that exists:

*Okwan tware asuo*

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<sup>191</sup>The Mamprusi are the ruling tribe in northern Ghana, and put a great emphasis on African Traditional Religion in everyday life and ceremonies, including installing chiefs.

<sup>192</sup> Builsa North is one of the constituencies represented in the Parliament of Ghana. It elects one Member of Parliament (MP) by the first past the post system of election. Builsa North is located in the Builsa district of the Upper East Region of Ghana.

<sup>193</sup>Kwame Gyekye, “*African Cultural Values – An Introduction*” (Accra, Ghana: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), 137.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 144.

*Asuo tware okwan,  
Opanyin ne hwan?  
Yetwaa okwan no kotoo asuo no,  
Asuo no firi tete, Odomankoma.*

O Path, thou crossest the River  
O River, thou crossest the Path.  
Which of you is the elder?  
We cut a Path, and it went and met the River,  
The River came forth long, long ago  
It came forth from the Creator of all things.<sup>197</sup>

In other words, paths are made by humans, but rivers and other forms of nature point to *Odomankoma*, the Creator, as their Originator. This Akan drum text epitomizes the proverbial language of the Akan.



*Nyame Dua  
symbolizing God's protection and presence*

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<sup>197</sup>Rattray, *Ashanti*, 286.

## Chapter 4

### Nsaguo & The Church

*If you want to speak to God, speak to the winds.*

Nsaguo seems to produce two totally different reactions to it. Some Christians are against it because their belief is that since Jesus Christ died for the sins of man, so in mentioning other s like Mother Earth and the ancestors, one would be committing sin against God/Jesus Christ.

A few people were surprised when Archbishop Peter Sarpong of Kumasi introduced some aspects of the Asante culture into the Christian liturgy. They were more surprised when he wrote a book on the controversial subject of Nsaguo; which he called “Libation”. I chose not to use this word because it is not the right translation of the performance of Nsaguo, even though Archbishop Sarpong feels that one is splitting hairs when we talk about the name of the performance.

Some have considered Nsaguo as a prayer but Archbishop Sarpong asks the question in his book on Libation: Are the Formulae Used in Libation True Prayers?<sup>198</sup> He goes on to state that the formulae which accompany the pouring of the drink bear the characteristic of true prayer. The prayers that are addressed to God are praiseworthy in themselves as they express his divine attributes and man’s confidence in his divine goodness. The prayers to the ancestors and the deities cannot be considered as the same

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<sup>198</sup>Sarpong, *Libation*, 29

as those addressed to God. The people make a distinction between God and these other spirits and nobody, in addressing the words to them, thinks he is giving the same honor as is given to the Supreme Being. Indeed the fact that at the beginning of the rites the Supreme Being may be called upon to give permission indicates that they do not want to worship these others as they do worship the Supreme Being.<sup>199</sup>

According to Archbishop Sarpong, the interpretation of religious actions must be done in the context of the overall religious perception of the people or of the particular religion in question. In Catholicism, we do say a lot of prayers to Saints. Hence the fact that the prayers are addressed to the ancestors and to the divinities in itself cannot be a prohibiting factor.<sup>200</sup>

Sarpong goes on to state that just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways, both by sacred ministers and by the faithful, and just as the one goodness of God is really communicated in different ways to his creatures, in the same way the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather embraces creatures whose co-operation in the Redeemer's mediation is but sharing in this one Source. It is therefore, unfair to accuse our people of robbing God of his excellence through libation. We can say that prayers said to the ancestors and to the divinities are not meant to replace the uniqueness of God. They are a sharing in God's power which he himself has allowed the ancestors and the divinities.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Sarpong, *Libation*, 30.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 37.

Still other priests have accepted the performance of Nsaguo because they believe that it's the words that are spoken that make the difference and not the performance itself. What is surprising to me is that some priests are vehemently opposed to Nsaguo because of the Jesus factor. They do not want to investigate the words of Nsaguo neither do they want to accept the fact that this communication prayer could be acceptable.

It is rather unfortunate that people do not take the time to find out what the words of Nsaguo really are. One does not really know what a Christian prays about when they kneel to pray. They may pray in silence and the audience may not know what they are saying. The Nsaguo words are open and public for everyone to hear, however that is not viewed as a positive action.

Nsaguo can be positive or negative depending on who the performer is. From my research though what I realized is that the words to Nsaguo are not negative. Words that are used are not used to incite hatred but to ask for peace, prosperity, blessings and a beneficial occasion in whatever activity that is being held.

Every human society has a set of ideas about what is good or bad, right or wrong, and what is deemed to be good behavior and what is regarded as reprehensible behavior. These notions, which have a great deal of influence on the conduct of the members of that particular society, are usually based upon some recognized authority whose sanctions are accepted and obeyed. To some, common sense is the source of morality while still others attribute morality to a religious or supernatural source. But, whatever the source moral sanctions have power to compel obedience.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 152.

Opoku goes on to state that African societies are no exception, although one must exercise caution when speaking about African moral values, for they are by no means uniform throughout the continent. Generally morality originates from religious considerations and so pervasive is religion in African culture that the two cannot be separated from each other. Thus what constitutes the moral code of any particular African society – the laws, taboos, customs and set forms of behavior- all derive their compelling power from religion.<sup>203</sup>

### **Examples of Nsaguo in the Old and New Testaments**

The Akan observe a rite called Nsaguo, a prayer which is an act of communicating with the Supreme Being, deities, ancestral spirits and the spirit world in general. The rite demands the pouring of a liquid substance on the ground, accompanied by the reciting of a prayer inspired by the occasion.<sup>204</sup> Any kind of drinkable liquid is used for Nsaguo. Some of the liquids used are as follows: pito or a native beer brewed from fermented corn, palm wine or nsafuo, akpeteshie, liquor distilled from palm wine, or imported drinks such as schnapps, whisky, rum and gin.

Water can also be used. Nsaguo can be performed at any gathering; specifically: nationwide epidemic, war, ritual for the ancestors on the sacred stools, marriage, nubility rites, apprenticeship, child naming ceremonies, official meetings, family discussions, before leaving home for a long or short journey and upon returning home after an absence of several years, upon graduation, the success of a business, the building of a house, a town meeting, durbars, enstoolment of a chief and before during and after

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<sup>203</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 152.

<sup>204</sup>Kyeremateng, *The Akans of Ghana: Their Customs, History and Institutions*, 93.



funerals rites. Some people believe that when performing the Nsaguo ritual, the performer asks God to punish those who are against them; hence the comparison with the Psalms of Imprecation.

There are several references of Nsaguo pouring in the Bible – in the Old Testament and the New Testament, but can we refer to these practices as being similar to Nsaguo in the Ghanaian context? The pouring of wine, water, or oil were part of the practices in the Temple in Jerusalem, part of an extremely complex set of ritual offerings to God having to do with thanksgiving, sin, healing, and other issues. They had nothing to do with ancestors, but rather, had to do with worship of God. The use of the word “Libation” in English translations of the Hebrew Bible should not be confused with the English term “Libation” used to refer, perhaps not appropriately to pouring rituals in ATR.<sup>205</sup> In the Old Testament, the first reference to libation can be found in Genesis:

And Jacob set up a Pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a Pillar of Stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. (Genesis 35:14)

In Exodus 29:38-43, instructions are given by God for a shrine to be built and with the type of offering to be given:

(38) This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. (39) Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. (40) With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. (41) Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning – a pleasing aroma an offering made to the Lord by fire. (42) For the generations to come this burnt offering are to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meetings before the Lord.

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<sup>205</sup> Conversations with Rabbi Jo David.

In Leviticus, it is stipulated that Libation should form part of the offerings that are to be presented to Yahweh on those holy occasions. In Numbers 4:7 it appears that Libation is a regular cultic practice when reference is made to “the flagons for the drink offering”. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of being poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith in 2 Timothy 4:6 Paul states:

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering  
and the time has come for my departure.

In John 7:37 the reference to the rivers of living waters is believed to be a reference to the libation rites of the feast of Tabernacles.

The references made to libation in the Bible are in no way a justification for the performance of Nsaguo as known in the Akan tradition. This is just to show that these forms of rituals can be found in all religions and there is no reason to condemn one mainly because of a lack of understanding.

The church has to acknowledge that there was an injustice done when the missionaries introduced Christianity into the community. Quoting from Opoku: From the Sekondi-Takoradi Survey conducted in 1950, in which he observed the Christians in the area, K.A. Busia concluded:” ...as one watches the daily lives and activities of the people, and takes account of the rites connected with marriage, birth, death , widowhood, harvest or installation to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities of the converts lie outside their Christian activities, and for all their influence, the Christian Churches are still alien institutions intruding upon, but not integrated with social institutions.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 169.

According to Quarcoopome, so far as the traditional African is concerned, God and the good life are closely connected. Religion sets patterns of behavior for the community as a whole thus influencing social and moral behavior. In this way religion binds the community together. The sense of covenant safeguards the life of the community.<sup>207</sup>

He goes on to further state that: it is wrong for some Westerners like A.B. Ellis and K. Little who have been exposed only a little to African religion to maintain that the idea of God in West African Traditional religion bears no relationship to the quality of life of man on earth. The notion of a remote God unconnected with the moral life of the African is alien to African life and thought. The root of this misconception might be traced to the wrong inference made from the myth of the separation of God from man. God is the ultimate source and sanction of the moral order.<sup>208</sup>

The African concept of the moral nature of God also shows his connection with the good life. The very first nature of God is virtue. An Akan Nsaguo prayer says: ‘The dependable God and Friend, the Benevolent, whose first nature is virtue’. The proverb “Goodness is the first nature of God” makes the same point. God is The Pure King, or the Perfect King.<sup>209</sup>



*Epa*

*You are the slave of him whose handcuffs you wear symbolizing law, justice, slavery*

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<sup>207</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 163-165.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 165-166.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 166.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**GOAL ONE – THE WITNESSES**  
*A single hand cannot lift the calabash to the head.*

Criteria to qualify as a team member are as follows:

Age - in order to have a broad spectrum of view, the minimum age was set at eighteen with no maximum age. The age of eighteen was because it was necessary to have team members who are old and mature enough to be independent thinkers, and to be able to utilize the travel journal which would be provided to all team members.

Maturity - It was important for the team members to be mature. Maturity is the period of time in your life after your physical growth has stopped and you are fully developed state of being mature; full development. Maturity in this case refers to maturity in mind and reasoning.

Intellectual ability to reason logically - This comes with the mature sense of reasoning, and having the ability to make decisions through the art of deduction. Some characteristics of a person with intellectual ability is as follows: an avid reader, provides very alert, rapid answers to questions, has a wide range of interests, is secure emotionally, is venturesome, wanting to do new things, needs little outside control - applies self discipline, is resourceful - solving problems by ingenious methods, is creative in new ideas, seeing associations, has the capacity to look into things and be puzzled, is involved with many exploratory type activities, reveals originality in oral and written expression, is perceptually open to his or her environment, displays a willingness to accept complexity, and is independent.

### Interest in Africa and African Culture

It was important to have team members who are interested in knowing more about Africa and the culture of Africa, so that there will be a genuine feeling of achievement when witnessing a cultural event. The understanding of religious rituals and interest in the intersection of religion and culture was important.

Being in the Multifaith track, it was important to have team members with an open mind, an appreciation of religious rituals of other religions and with an interest in how the different religions overlap.

In order of importance, the understanding of religious rituals and an interest in the intersection of religion and culture was of utmost importance followed by an interest in Africa and African culture. After all, this demonstration project is about an African ritual and having a team with these attributes is important. This strategy was accomplished because selected team members all had an interest in the purpose of the trip. Conclusion: – At the end of this specific strategy we felt that based on the participation and the effort of each and every team member exhibited, this strategy was accomplished.

It was necessary to recruit a team to serve as witnesses to the program. The recruitment of the team A was from a group of Christians, both African American and Ghanaian who were willing to take the trip to Ghana to witness the ritual. It was also necessary to develop requirements to be used to recruit the team members; because consistency of thought and mindset was needed for this demonstration project. Thus out of the requirements grew criteria which were used to recruit the team. These criteria were used to select the team members. It was important for the team members to have a clear

understanding of the objectives. It was necessary for the team to be recruited to have the following:

- 1) Interest in a religious mission for the benefit of the community
- 2) Objectivity to be able to appreciate the merits of the mission
- 3) Ability to keep issues on an impersonal level.
- 4) The ability to critically analyze different points of view

The criteria developed for the requirements to recruit the team members, also had these in-built fulfillment of the objectives listed above; so this strategy was accomplished. I was able to recruit Rabbi Jo David, Rev. Christine Foster, Rev. Dr. Wanda Lundy and Rev. Dr. Daniel Nyante from the United States to be a part of my team.

The strategy was accomplished because flight arrangements were made through ITE International Travel Exchange and the flight dates were set for December 26, 2009 as the departure date from New York Kennedy Airport, via Delta Airlines; with an arrival date of December 27, 2009 at Kotoka International Airport in Ghana. Members of the team got their passports and their visas - some were arranged through the Travel agency. All team members received their visas and travel documents prior to the departure date.

Two telephone conferences were scheduled with team members to discuss issues they may have. One was held in November 16, 2009 and the second was held on December 7, 2009 to finalize details of the trip, and to make sure all concerns and questions had been answered. Flight dates were set and visas obtained. I arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December ahead of the group which was due to arrive on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December. I met the group at the airport with Rev. Nyante and we all went to Akropong from the

airport. Team members were met at the Airport and were driven to Akropong where they were shown their lodging, settled in for the day to start orientation the next morning.

The commissioning occurred on the 28<sup>th</sup> instead of the 27<sup>th</sup> because that was when the other team members from Ghana could participate in the project. Members were commissioned by Rev. Nyante and were given an orientation by Pro. Kofi Asare Opoku. I explained the reason for the trip and the participants were given a copy of the travel journal. (See Appendix 8) A trip schedule was prepared - see Appendix 4 for the program schedule details.

On Monday morning, other team members from Ghana joined together with the US team to form the group. The group was commissioned by Rev. Daniel Nyante utilizing the travel journal. There were a few questions asked by the team members about the demonstration project and the expectations of the candidate. See Appendix 5 the question and answer session at the commissioning.



*“Woforo Dua pa a ye pia w tu – when you climb a good tree you are give a push” Symbolizing support, cooperation*

**CHAPTER 6: -**  
**GOAL TWO – THE INNOVATION**  
*One must come out of one's house to begin learning*

On December 28, two Kings; Nana Offei Agyemang Krontihene of Akuapem and Nana Osabarima Mamfehene of Akuapem and their entourage came to the TIDAC headquarters for discussions. They came with their Okyeames and gave us insights as to what Nsaguo was about. See Appendix 4. The videographer taped several recordings of the Nsaguo ritual by the following people: 1) The Chief linguist, 2) Krontihene 3) Professor Opoku, and at the Asafosa Peace Ritual and the Durbar.

A transcript of the following interviews can be found in Appendix 7:

- The interview with the two chiefs and their linguists and sub chiefs.
- An interview with Archbishop Peter Sarpong - a retired pastor of the Catholic church who has written several books on African culture and Religion and incorporated cultural ritual and liturgy into his service while a practicing priest at Kumasi, Ghana. See Appendix 9

There were several insights when these interviews were conducted. It was during the orientation session that we found out that there are two types of Nsaguo: 1) a ritual similar to a congregational prayer done in public and 2) a ritual that is only conducted by priests of a deity and is done in private because there are incantations and specific requests are made of the deity. The demonstration project is about the first ritual which can be conducted at any time for any purpose, in a) remembrance of the ancestors and b) in communication with them and asking them to join in whatever activity is going on at that time; a public congregational prayer.



According to Archbishop Sarpong, he lived in a multifaith atmosphere first hand. He did not have to research; he knew what his uncles were doing. He knew their principles of life, he knew their philosophies of life and he knew what his father and his mother were expected to do. When he grew up and did theology, honestly he did not find any substantial differences between the belief of his uncles and the belief of the Catholic Church.

According to Archbishop Sarpong, there was the basic belief in a Supreme Being who has his own name, is kind and eternal nothing specifically Christian. There are things in Christianity that are specifically Christian. The basis of it all – is the same and that is what made him go to Oxford to do anthropology after completing his studies in Rome. When he was doing the subjects, the knowledge of God, it was piling up, philosophy of eschatological terms but at the end, everything pointed to the same concept that God is kind, God is one, God is our master. So he picked up a lot from the environment in which he grew up.

Archbishop Sarpong stated that he felt Nsaguo does not go against the teachings of Christianity. If anything, it strengthens the teaching of Christianity. Christianity teaches the existence of God, Christianity teaches the existence of spirits good and bad, Christianity teaches the existence and belief in saints who once lived in our lives, and have satisfied certain conditions and supposedly live in a place with no pain. That is what Christianity is teaching.

Christianity's concept of the spirit may not coincide with the concept of abosom. They are spirits good and bad just as in Christianity, there are spirits good and bad. As Prof said, if we want to split hairs we can look at the concept and say are they the same?

Dei Uno, his people do not believe there are many Gods, they believe there is only one God. Rev. Dr. Lundy summed it up best when she said at the interview that the insight she got from listening to the interview as that Nsaguo helps us keep up the godliness in us.

I also spoke to Rev. Rosina Ampah who happened to be in New York doing supervised ministry. Rev. Rosina explained to me that she has not incorporated Nsaguo into her liturgy, however, she is not opposed to performing Nsaguo should the need arise. I had another discussion with Rev. Rosina and the summary of the discussion is attached.

I was not able to videotape the liturgy because as stated before, Rev. Rosina has not incorporated Nsaguo into her liturgy, however, as a priest, she finds nothing wrong in pouring Nsaguo. This point is very important and Rev. Rosina went on further to tell me of an incident that happened to her. Rev. Rosina had built an orphanage in her hometown of Saltpond, which happens to be my hometown as well. She went home to have an open house and invited friends and relatives to come and celebrate with her. In our tradition, an occasion like this, would call for the performing of Nsaguo; so after saying the necessary prayers, Rev. Rosina asked for a bottle of schnapps and she performed Nsaguo asking God and her ancestors to be part of the festivities.

There was a relative who considered himself to be a “Born Again Christian” who even though he had a problem did not voice it out until he was on his way home with Rev. Rosina’s sister. He asked Rev. Rosina’s sister why did Rev. Rosina a priest, performed Nsaguo and her sister’s response was, why are you asking me? I did not perform the Nsaguo, why don’t you go back and ask her yourself? He never did. As my

challenge statement stated, most Ghanaian “Born Again Christian” frown on Nsaguo performing because they feel is against the Christian faith.

The video tape was received however in discussing the issue of editing and translation with my site team, it was decided that it would be better to have the videotape in English. The format would be to use the other Nsaguo rituals as examples of true life experiences. The videotapes of the different rituals were received and incorporated into one. The educational video would be viewed first and then the real/true life experience videos will follow.

The educational video on Nsaguo was performed by my advisor Professor Kofi Asare Opoku in English so there was no need for a translation. His words are what will also be used in the handbook. The educational video will be available for sale at the TIDAC website after the demonstration project has been approved and after graduation. There was no need to edit the video tapes because the educational video was done in English. Based on the educational videos, the decision was made by the site team to use the other videos as examples of real life situations where Nsaguo is being performed and hence did not need translation.



*Nyansapo*

*“wisdom knot – wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence and patience*

**CHAPTER 7**  
**GOAL THREE – THE GIFT**

*If God did not give the swallow any other gift, he gave her the gift of swiftness of movement.*

I was invited to the Ebenezer Methodist Church in Hyattsville to talk about my demonstration project. Unfortunately their priest who was very much interested in the project had to leave. The leaders of the church have not been able to set a time for me to make a presentation for them because they are now actively trying to recruit a new priest. I also feel that the presentation will go better with the endorsement of the priest. I intend to follow up and give this presentation even after the presentation of the demonstration project.

St Christopher's Church is undergoing a change, trying to grapple with the search for a new rector and grappling with a few other issues. There were too many situations for St. Christopher's which led me to believe that I may not get enough people to attend the workshop to make the research viable. Waiting till after graduation would still work because eventually, I intend to produce a book out of this demonstration project.

TIDAC was asked and agreed to visit Rev. Chris Foster's Presbyterian Church in Rhode Island to present the educational videotape. Rev. Chris Foster who was a member of my team in Ghana was very interested in having a workshop on Nsaguo. So when the video was ready, I was able to establish a date – December 12, 2010. I went over to Providence, Rhode Island and worshipped with Rev Chris. Rev. Chris had sent out email alerts about the workshop. After church service and their coffee hour, 30 participants

joined us in the basement of the church. They were presented with a pre-video questionnaire and a post-video questionnaire. See Appendix 12.

Due to time constraints, I was unable to give a presentation at St. Christopher's or Ebenezer Methodist Church.; but these presentations will be made even after the thesis has been accepted by the school. There is the Shamanic Group that is also interested in the subject matter and will either join St Christopher's when I am making the presentation or will have a separate presentation of their own.



*Dame-Dame*

*Name of a board game symbolizing intelligence and ingenuity*

## CHAPTER 8 THE CONCLUSION

*“It is through other people’s wisdom that we learn wisdom ourselves, a single person’s understanding does not amount to anything.”*

The story of early African Christianity needs to be told to African children in villages and cities. The story deserves to be told in a simple way and though it will be heard by a global audience, it first must find a way of reaching the African child.<sup>210</sup> The global Christian mind has been formed out of a specific history, not out of bare-bones theoretical ideas. Much of that history occurred in Africa. It is the story of the children of Abraham in Africa; Joseph in Africa; Moses in Africa; Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Africa; and shortly thereafter, Mark and Perpetua and Athanasius and Augustine in Africa. The truth of Christianity has always been told in a story form. It is a narrative of God’s work in creation and history. Christian truth is shaped by the specific memory of the apostles’ story about what happened with Israel and Jesus.<sup>211</sup>

Among the chief patterns for interpreting the apostolic writings were those hewn and refined in Africa before they found a home in Europe or the Near East. There are persistent reasons why African perspectives on early Christianity have been neglected –

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<sup>210</sup> Oden, Thomas C. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2007), 11.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 14.

even systematically ignored. That evidence must in due time be presented convincingly by African minds to an African audience.<sup>212</sup>

African Christians cannot further postpone the quest for lost roots. A wider database of information is needed and needed soon. Primary texts written centuries ago need to be translated and made available. They have been too long buried. The age of digital communication gives new opportunities to make much more of it accessible. Africa cannot wait to discover its own rich history. The struggle for identity is urgent and mounting.<sup>213</sup>

According to Thomas Oden, Africa shaped Christianity in seven ways:

1. How the birth of the European University was anticipated within African Christianity;
2. How Christian historical and spiritual exegesis of Scripture first matured in Africa;
3. How African thinkers shaped the very core of the most basic early Christian dogma;
4. How early ecumenical decisions followed African conciliar patterns;
5. How Africa shaped Western forms of spiritual formation through monastic discipline;
6. How Neoplatonic philosophy of late antiquity moved from Africa to Europe;
7. How influential literary and dialectical skills were refined in Africa.<sup>214</sup>

Oden goes on to cite several influences that Africans had on Christianity such as how the Western penitential practice was profoundly shaped by Optatus of Milevis and the teaching of justification by Marius Victorinus. There are several other influences of Africans such as Minucius Felix on apologetics, of Lactantius on universal history, of

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<sup>212</sup>Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 14.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

Primasius on apocalyptic interpretation, of Athanasius on civil disobedience, of Cyprian on ecclesiology, of Tertullian on theological method.

### **Educational Aspects**

The world is becoming a world of transnationals; immigration has become commonplace and cultures and traditions have become commonplace. Transnationalism the state of not being confined to a single nation or state, but including, extending over or operating within more than one nation is what the world is facing today. In a *Paper prepared for Internationalizing Theological Education conference Emory University, September 200, Dale T. Irvin, President and Professor of World Christianity, New York Theological Seminary, New York spoke about Transnationalism as follows:*

NYTS is discovering regarding the practice of theological education in an emerging context of transnationalization. Steven Vertovec, in his recent book on Transnationalism, defines the phenomenon succinctly as “sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states.”<sup>215</sup> It is a corollary to globalization, he continues.

Facilitated, but not caused, by improved transportation, technology and telecommunications, globalization has entailed the increasing extend, intensity, velocity and impact of global interconnectedness across a broad range of human domains. Enhanced transnational connections between social groups represent a key manifestation of globalization.”<sup>216</sup>

Transnationalism challenges many of the fundamental notions of theological education in North America precisely because it challenges the notion of teaching and

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<sup>215</sup>Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2009, 2.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.



learning being defined by a territorial nation or state. Saskia Sassen notes that “...the fact that a process happens within the territory of a sovereign state does not necessarily mean that it is a national process.”<sup>217</sup> Theological education in North America has for the most part not come to terms with that realization. NYTS is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), and is registered with the New York State Department of Education (NYSED). ATS is a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). In the case of NYSED, the territory is the state of New York, while in the case of both ATS and CHEA, the territory is the nation. All of these bodies conduct their work mostly as if education were a national process, or at best an international project. For the most part, the transnational remains beyond their horizons.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Saskia Sassen, “Cracked Casings: Notes toward an Analytics for Studying Transnational Processes,” *New Transnational Social Spaces: International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First Century*, Ludger Pries, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 187.

<sup>218</sup> Both the U.S. Department of Education and CHEA relate internationally to other accrediting bodies in ways that parallel the relationship of US legal institutions to those of international law, or the relationship of the U.S. political processes to the work of the United Nations and its various agencies. The effect is to force education, including theological education, to remain primarily defined territorially, and to respond primarily to concerns that are territorial in nature. See for instance the statement by the International Affairs Office, U.S. Department of Education, “Accreditation and Quality Assurance: Postsecondary Accreditation,” from December 2007, which states:

The U.S. Department of Education’s limited authority to recognize accrediting agencies under the legal provisions pertaining to federal assistance is restricted to the domestic territory of the United States. For accreditation outside the United States, the federal government relies on the national accreditation and quality assurance authorities in countries with which the United States has diplomatic relations, the information provided by international organizations to which the United States belongs, and international agreements such as the Lisbon Convention. States, institutions, and employers rely on these sources plus the recommendations of credential evaluators, admissions officials, and other experts.

The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is an active member of the International Network for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and participates in UNESCO and OECD activities relating to higher education, quality assurance and recognition. (Accessed online at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/accred-postsec.doc>)

The concepts of territory and territorial boundaries that shape or define (and often confine) teaching and learning for the most part in North America fit quite comfortably with the traditional patterns of territorial churches that characterized denominationalism in the modern era in the West. Candidates traditionally came to seminary or divinity school from churches with national identities. If they were training for ministry within the nation, they were going to be pastors.

If they were training for ministry outside the nation, they were going to be missionaries. Teaching and learning were generally geared toward fulfilling the ordination requirements of the former, the needs of future pastors as defined by national church bodies. What might be the ministerial needs or pedagogical concerns related to the contexts of the latter, those who were going to be “missionaries” and thus work internationally, were of far less concern.

In the book “ The African Diaspora and the Study of Religion, edited by Theodore Louis Trost, Afe Adogame writes about the transnationalization of New African Churches as follows:

One distinguishing feature of the recent trend as compared to previous waves of immigration, is the fluid nature of transnational networks that characterize what Castles and Miller describe as “the age of migration” (2003). The transnational quality of many African churches in diaspora challenges the assumption that immigrants inevitably cut off ties to the homeland after integration into the new host context. Most new African churches immigrant churches are rooted locally, with ties to the land of origin, while also maintaining relationships through the intra-command web that links them with different places across the globe. These communities are connected through religion, economy, friendship, kinship, politics, and increasingly by cell phones and in particular, the Internet - which has become a key component in the development and maintenance of diasporic identity. Diasporas are webs and webs consist

not only of fibers and ropes but also of the nodes that link them together (Haller 2001:7).<sup>219</sup>

Thus the place of local and global networks among African churches in both home and host contexts cannot be overemphasized. Such networks assume increasingly significance for new African migrants. The range and nature of ties include new ecumenical affiliations, pastoral exchanges between Africa, Europe and the United States, special events and conferences, prayer networks, Internet sites, international ministries, publications and audio/video and tele-evangelism. The “flow” is two-directional with both global and local sending and receiving links. The proliferation of social ties among new African Immigrants, and between immigrant churches and host churches and their home bases has implications that need to be contextually understood.<sup>220</sup>

New Africans are carving out a niche within the Diaspora and contributing to the diversification of the religious landscape.

The transnational character of this phenomenon suggests a number of significant topics that need further contextualization and analysis. There are links to the original home from the diaspora, the peculiarities that arise in the host context; the reverse mission dynamic as an evolving dimension of the transnational process; and the myriad of spheres of mutual exchange, reinforcement, and influence that pertain in the contemporary context of globalization.<sup>221</sup>

His Grace Rev. Peter Sarpong makes a very interesting point when he notes that African Traditional religion still has an influence on the African and often directs the way of life even of the best of their members. One of the leaders in the Catholic Church in Ghana compares the situation to that of a frog. It jumps

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<sup>219</sup> Trost, Theodore, Louis, ed. *“The African Diaspora and the Study of Religion”* ( New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 25.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid.

into the river when it suits it and jumps out of the river onto the land when it finds it advantageous to do so.<sup>222</sup>

When some of us commit crimes, as unfortunately they do often, they will inevitably deny any wrong doing when confronted. If they are asked to swear by our Founder or even by Oyankop n that what they are saying is true, they will have no hesitation in coming forward to swear. But ask them to swear by Antoa Nyamaa or Mim Bo or Tano or any of the abosom, and they would not dare to tell a lie.<sup>223</sup>

It is rather unfortunate that some Ghanaian Christians do not accept our traditions and culture. In conversations with some “Christian” friends I asked them about their thoughts on Nsaguo and the response was – Oh I don’t think it’s necessary for the names of all the ancestors to be called. My next question was – do you know who ancestors are? Are you aware that not everyone can be an ancestor? The answer was – no I didn’t know that and my next question was – Do you believe in saints and the answer was – yes and my next question was – why is that so different from your ancestor? – There was no response to that. A lot of us are ignorant about our culture and unfortunately, we have not taken the time to find out, to learn more about the culture and to educate our children about the same. An excerpt from Pope John Paul’s message to the Catholic Synod in the Post-Synodal Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa* (The Church in Africa):

Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these people, as is also the

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<sup>222</sup>Peter K Sarpong, *Dear Nana: Letters to my Ancestor – Volume Two* (Takoradi-Ghana: Franciscan Publications, 2006), 82.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid.

need for rites of purification and expiation.  
The sons and daughters of Africa love life.  
It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give  
such great importance to the veneration of their  
ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead  
continue to live and remain in communion with them.  
Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the  
Communion of Saints?

The peoples of Africa respect the life which is  
conceived and born. They rejoice in this life. They reject  
the idea that it can be destroyed even when the so-called  
'progressive civilizations' would like to lead them in this  
direction. And practices hostile to life are imposed on  
them by means of economic systems which serve the  
selfishness of the rich. Africans show their respect for  
human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents  
and relatives within the family.

African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity  
and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to  
celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole  
village. Indeed, community life in African societies  
expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope  
and prayer that Africa will always preserve this  
priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the  
temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best  
tradition.

The Church certainly respects and esteems the  
non-Christian religions professed by very many Africans  
for these religions are the living expressions of the soul  
of vast people. However, today I urge you to look inside  
yourself. Look to the richness of your own tradition.

Look to the faith which we are celebrating in this assembly.  
Here you will find genuine freedom. Here you will find  
Christ who will lead you to the truth.<sup>224</sup>

In the latest book by Elizabeth Gilbert: *Eat Pray, Love*, the author talks about her  
divorce while driving on a book tour driving with her Lebanese friend Iva across Kansas.

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<sup>224</sup>Sarpong, *Dear Nana: Letters to my Ancestor – Volume Two*, 83 – 84.

Gilbert talks about her reticence in asking God through prayer to help her soon-to-be-divorced husband to sign the divorce papers. The divorce had been dragging on nearly two years. She was wishing she could get some divine intervention. Her friend asks her why she could not and her answer was she felt that asking God for specific things felt like a kind of weakness of faith; God may want her to face the difficulties she was facing at that time.<sup>225</sup>

Iva informs Elizabeth that because she is a child of the universe, she is entitled to participate in the actions of the universe and urges her to make her case to God. She asks Elizabeth to write out her petition to God. Iva agreed that she would sign the petition and asks Elizabeth who else would sign the petition. Elizabeth believes that her family, mother, father and sister would also sign it. Iva said she felt Elizabeth's family sign her petition; they had added their names to the list of those who were petitioning God on Elizabeth's behalf. Elizabeth names all these people both dead and alive – people like Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jackie Robinson, Bill Clinton, and Nelson Mandela.

Elizabeth believed that these people, who stood for peace, would intervene on her behalf. She takes a nap after calling out all these names because she felt her anxiety melt away. A little after she woke up, her phone rang and her attorney informed her that her husband had finally signed the divorce papers. Elizabeth wrote about this occurrence because something happened through the spirits of the names she called. Some of the people were dead but lived good moral lives. What Elizabeth did calling on the people of the spiritual world is similar to what the Akans do when they call on their ancestors.

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<sup>225</sup>Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love: one woman's search for everything across Italy, India and Indonesia* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 32.

Elizabeth asked them to intercede with God on her behalf. She believed that it happened and that is why her husband finally signed the divorce papers.

Through Nsaguo contact is established between the spiritual and the human, material or physical world. (But who says there is only one way of doing so?).

Nsaguo expresses the African belief that the dead are not dead and that the dead continue to live as members of their families/communities and that the living can communicate with them.

Since death does not terminate human relationships, the dead, who are members of their families/communities, are invited through Nsaguo, to come and participate in the on-going activities/events in the families/communities. The dead ancestors live close to God/Supreme Being and function as our intermediaries; and since they have lived here on earth before, they understand our problems and can relay them to God/Supreme Being, and that is why we call on them during Nsaguo. The prayers in Nsaguo are meant to pass through them to God/Supreme Being.

We sometimes begin Nsaguo by saying, "Osor nsa! Asase nsa!", but we often do not understand the meaning of the words and the fundamental principle in African culture that the words are affirming. By saying so, we are calling on the heavens and the earth or earth and sky, the two great fructifying forces in the universe which come together to sustain human life on earth. (What is wrong in acknowledging our dependence on these great forces that sustain our life on planet earth?).

Nsaguo is also an act of remembrance and sharing. Through it the living share food and drink with the dead. (Why should we forget our dead simply because we have been converted to Christianity?).

According to Prof. Opoku, the introduction of Islam and Christianity, as well as the impingement of the modern world has all brought their influences to bear on traditional religion and culture in Africa. The influences have been reciprocal.<sup>226</sup> In the case of Christianity, for example, the early missionaries demanded a complete break with tradition as evidence of one's conversion. It was assumed in the early days of missionary activity that there must be Europeanization before Christianization and consequently traditional life was brought under heavy fire. Conversion, therefore, led to the abandonment of many of the rituals practiced in traditional religion and further led to the complete disregard of most of the gods, their priests and other functionaries who played an important role in the religion.<sup>227</sup>

### **Liturgical Relevance**

Upon reading my proposal, my rector, Charles Hoffacker had the following thoughts about my demonstration project:

*The project upon completion promises to be helpful to several groups. In particular, it will contribute to an optimal relationship between the practices of African Traditional Religion and Christianity, and will model a way for diaspora Africans to honor their heritage and contribute to the evolution of the Christian community. The story of Christianity in the United States involves the transplantation of traditions (Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and Roman Catholicism) which have changed as a result of taking root in new soil. It also includes the development of indigenous traditions (Disciples of Christ, Pentecostalism).*

*The same holds true for the story of Christianity in Africa. Your proposal addresses a practice from African Traditional Religion that has an unresolved relationship with Christianity in Africa, and the beginnings of a relationship with Christianity in the United States. Nsaguo is likely to evolve (1) in dialogue with African Christianity and African culture and (2) in dialogue with American Christianity and American culture. Moreover,*

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<sup>226</sup> Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 167.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.



*these two trajectories of evolution are likely to influence one another, especially through people who are connected with both places.*

***How have the words and actions of Nsaguo been transmitted up until now?***

- *Was it by oral tradition, manuscripts, or in some other way? What are the implications of preparing a handbook on this practice? Here I have in the back of my mind a comparison with the effects of printing on Christian liturgy. The publishing of the first **Book of Common Prayer** (1549) and of Roman Catholic liturgical books brought about a standardization over against the preceding use of manuscripts which often differed significantly from one place to another.*
- *The Christian tradition (particularly Orthodox and Roman Catholic theology) uses a trio of Greek words denoting different kinds of reverence. The worship appropriate to God alone is latria. The honor shown to the saints is dulia. The honor shown to Mary (due to her unique role in the economy of salvation) is hyperdulia. Perhaps Nsaguo contains a helpful challenge to Christianity to name as well the reverence due to ancestors (other than canonized saints) who are deserving of remembrance and respect. This connects with the duality of All Saints' and All Souls' days: the first celebrates Christ's triumph in the lives of all the faithful departed, known to us and unknown; the second is an opportunity to pray for the faithful departed, that they may enjoy "the unsearchable benefits" of Christ's passion.*

*Now a personal anecdote, I spent several days last week in New York City. Thursday, the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, was the centennial of the birth of my father, who died in 1985. I wanted to remember him in some way, and was given the opportunity to do so. A couple blocks from my hotel was a church named for St. John the Baptist, and so on his birthday I spent some time there in prayer. Recognizing connection with the ancestors is a universal human desire; your project invites us to honor that desire, how it is expressed in one part of Africa, and how it can be expressed also in one part of the African diaspora.*

*The two dialogues I mentioned refer to how Nsaguo is likely to evolve as a practice in at least two places: Africa and the United States. In each location it is in dialogue with changing and diverse local cultures and churches. In each location its evolution will be somewhat different and appropriately so. But in addition, the two lines of evolution will interact with each other because persons and groups in one also participate in and are aware of what is happening in the other. There's plenty of opportunity for intriguing and unexpected developments.*

*I think non-Africans will eventually see Nsaguo and be able to use it. Some of these non-Africans will be people of African descent; others will not be. I have in front of me a fine essay entitled "Hispanic Influences on Worship in the English Tongue." It examines Hispanic influence on both early English Prayer Books and more recent*

*Anglican liturgies, including the Episcopal Church's BCP. It can readily imagine an essay appearing in fifty or a hundred years entitled "African Influences on Worship in the Episcopal Church."*

*One reason non-Africans will be able to "get this" is that Nsaguo appears to me to address a spiritual reality and pastoral need common to all Christians and probably all people. Those of us shaped mostly by the North Atlantic world are maybe out of touch with this spiritual reality and the pastoral need has not been effectively addressed in our experience. Maybe Nsaguo, adapted to our culture, can help. I can see liturgies coming out of these two lines of evolution, or what I expect to see is Nsaguo appearing as a feature in the regular services of the Church (Eucharist and Daily Office) and other services (Marriage, Burial of the Dead).*

*Nsaguo could be especially helpful in liturgies for All Saints' and All Souls' days. In some places a Litany of the Saints is used on All Saints' and a list of names of the departed offered in prayer on All Souls'. It seems Nsaguo could be included with both of these practices.<sup>228</sup>*

To me, part of the problems we have in this world now is the fact that not only is we not accepting of people of other faiths, but we tend to be judgmental about them without actually understanding them. If people are accepting of the religion of others, they can respect or at least be respectful of the rights of others to choose the religion that best fulfills their spiritual needs, we will be getting somewhere in our quest for peace in this world. A lot of internal conflicts have been fought in the name of religion.

### **Continued Relevance of Nsaguo**

I thought it best to insert some of the thoughts and comments from a member of my site team which I felt was a very viable contribution to the continued relevance of the practice of Nsaguo as well as the work of the Institute as a whole. Here are Kathleen Berney's thoughts on the proposal:

*Your proposed plan of implementation will be a major project, but the end results --- raising the awareness of those invited to view the film about the changes in America's landscape since passage of the Immigration Law of 1965; producing videos of the*

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<sup>228</sup>Hoffacker, Charles feedback given after reading the Nsaguo demonstration proposal.

*Libation Rituals of Ghana and Nigeria, and the hand book --- will be well worth the effort.*

*The Preliminary Analysis of the Challenge Statement was interesting and educational for me. Points five and six from your interview with Professor Kofi Asare Opoku struck a few chords within me, because I find myself asking those same questions.*

*I feel the aspects of one's culture, traditions, and spirituality are extremely important, and a treasure to be preserved and cherished, especially in time of Diaspora. I feel that the spirituality, traditions, and the stories that come out of one's culture have a large part in leading us to that innate connection with God, which all of us have from the moment of birth. I can't help but think that reconnecting with and preserving these things not only enriches one's spiritual path, but in a situation in which the community has been uprooted and scattered, these connections can also bring a measure of comfort, reassurance, and healing. The intentions and goals set forth in your proposal will create valuable tools to help make this happen.*

*African religion is also known as animism which is a system of belief and practices based on the idea that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by spirits or souls. African peoples tell stories about these spirits and these constitute some of their beliefs. Christianity and Islam should be known as animism because there is an acknowledgement of the existence of spirits - but when it pertains to Africans, the reference made is derogatory and negative.*

*I don't know very much about Islam, but I agree with you that Christianity should be known as animism, and perhaps Judaism, as well. There's plenty of evidence of this in the Psalm 98, for example.*

*Reading through the section dealing with Ancestor Worship resonated within my own spirit because I've always believed that the parents, grandparents, and others who have died, and passed on to the world of spirit do indeed watch over us, and communicate with us. My father communicated with me not long after his death, and gave me a very important message that spoke to a situation I was dealing with at the time. I also have an ancestor, who works with me in doing certain kinds of shamanic work.*

*In Ghana there is the saying that: "No one teaches a child who God is" it is almost as if you are born with an innate spiritualism that no one can take away from your childhood.*

*The above reminds me of the passage from Jeremiah 31: 33 – 34: "‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD." leads me to wonder if this intimate knowledge of God hasn't actually been there all the time.*

*The steps for implementation, and what you will need to do in order to follow through to meet the goals set, are clear, concise, and very well thought out. This applies to the research questions and the people you've chosen to interview. One thing I'd be very interested in is among the Christians who see no contradiction between their faith and the practice of Nsa Guo is have they always believed this way, or did they at some point in their lives have to wrestle with this question. I believe we can learn a great deal from the struggles, the wrestling, and questioning other people go through as they walk their chosen spiritual paths.*

*I have one question out of curiosity and for clarity. Is anyone allowed to perform the Ritual of Nsa Guo, or is that limited to people like the chiefs, shamans, or as in the case of your father and you, heads of household?*

*Within the multi faith dimension, St. Christopher's location is in a very unique position because within a twenty mile radius, it is surrounded by many different religious places of worship. There are several religious and spiritual places of worship such as 1 Buddhist temple, 1 Mosque, 3 Hindu temples 7 synagogues, two seventh day Adventist churches, and three AME Baptist churches just to name a few.*

*I believe that the uniqueness of St Christopher's position will enable me to start a program at St Christopher's where we can begin a dialogue with the different religions. I believe St. Christopher's can start a relationship with at least one of the religious groups to expand the knowledge of the members of the congregation.*

*I think this would be an exciting way of reaching out to the members of our community. Although St. Christopher's is involved with ministries like Community Café, and Help by Phone, were not doing anything as a church within the community, except for the Messiah Concert in December, but that happens once a year. We have nothing ongoing. Initiating dialog, discovering things held in common, and coming to an understanding with people not only of different religions, but of different denominations within Christianity as well is something I feel is desperately needed.<sup>229</sup>*

Quarcoopome poses the question: What future has the traditional religion? He goes on to state that, those who hold the view that in consequence of the impact of external forces the traditional religion has become outmoded and irrelevant, and therefore cannot survive in the near future, first of all point to the devastating effect of Western civilization. The advent of Western civilization has brought in its wake urbanization and

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<sup>229</sup> Feedback received from Kathleen Berney after reading my D.Min proposal.

industrialization which have disturbed and transformed the relatively peaceful and stable order of the rural areas. Many people, especially the youth have drifted to the urban centers in search of job opportunities. In the process the youth no longer enjoy the security of the village life.<sup>230</sup>

Since such people are no longer under the watchful care of their families, they become anonymous entities, completely lost in the rat race for mere survival. Traditional values are discarded in a complex money economy. Respect for the elders is on the decline and chastity before and during marriage is becoming a thing of the past. Traditional hospitality and generosity which make each his brother's keeper is replaced by a new morality which stresses selfishness as a virtue: "Each man for himself and God for us all" Thus all that is good in traditional morality is lost in the name of Christianity and civilization.<sup>231</sup>

Foreign religions (especially Christianity and Islam) acting as social forces, have played no small role in de-emphasizing the significance of the Traditional Religion. Many converts to these religions have been indoctrinated against the Traditional Religion which is derogatorily designated as paganism, idolatry, heathenism and fetishism, and Kafiri in Islam.<sup>232</sup>

In contrast to the Traditional Religion which has no propaganda machinery with which to fight back and retain her lost adherents, Christianity and Islam have between

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<sup>230</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 191.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>232</sup>*Ibid.* 191.

them adequate and effective propaganda machinery with which to crucify the traditional faith and propagate their beliefs. In addition to their own national newspapers and magazines like the Catholic Standard, the Challenge and the Watch Tower and other religious tracts, these foreign religions control and use the mass media to promote the liquidation of the Traditional Religion.<sup>233</sup>

Yearly pilgrimages to Mecca and Jerusalem raise the status symbol of the followers of these faiths. It therefore becomes a mark of social distinction to belong to any of the foreign religions. Occasional festivals marking important landmarks in the lives of the founders of these faiths such as Easter and Christmas for Christians and Id-El-Fitri and Id-El-Kabir for Muslims become national events and public holidays. Random visits by their religious leaders such as the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury raise the dignity and the morale of the members to the detriment of the Traditional Religion.<sup>234</sup>

Mention must also be made of the Indigenous or Syncretic or Spiritual Churches like the Celstial Church of Christ, Aladura, Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church, Muzama Disco Christo Churches' attempt to combine the traditional faith with Christianity and have succeeded in winning the majority of those who are not attracted to the historical churches like the Catholics and protestants. These spiritual churches accept the traditional world view about evil spirits and their devastating effects on human life and thus reach the fundamental needs of the African both spiritually and mentally.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 191

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 193.

Thus Traditional Religion is threatened by urbanization, industrialization, education, Western medicine, foreign religious and shortage of adherents. But in spite of all these devastating forces against the Traditional Religion, it appears to another school of thought that the traditional faith will persist in the face of all odds. There appears to be a new growing awareness of the need to keep and preserve the religion of our forefathers by concerned educated Africans. Such awareness stems from the prominent place given to African Traditional Religion in the educational system.<sup>236</sup>

Many have come to realize that the foreign terminologies used to designate the traditional religion are the product of ignorance prejudice resisted illumination and intellectual dilemmas. The divinities are now seen as functionaries and intermediaries between God and man. They are ministers in the theocratic government of the universe. More and more educated Christians and Muslims are assuming the role of traditional chiefs. In all cases, they conform to the traditional rites of installation or coronation and adhere to traditionally laid down rituals, customs and taboos.<sup>237</sup>

Culture maintains itself by the principles of continuity and discontinuity. The same applies to religion Judaism, Christianity and Islam have passed through these stages and survived, Thus the Traditional Religion is bound to survive in a modified form, while retaining some of its original and positive elements.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup>Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 193.

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>238</sup>*Ibid.*

According to Dr. Appiah-Kubi, culture is important for the growth, development and respect of the individual and his community. The Church has throughout the years, not fully appreciated, respected and used the cultural rites and their values in her evangelization. This has undoubtedly aroused reactions of all kinds; some too extreme, others very compromising and many critical and selective but positive. We acknowledge the transforming nature of our culture as well as Christianity.<sup>239</sup>

The advocates hold firmly the belief that if any man or woman wants to follow Christ he or she should leave the mother, father, family and society and follow Christ. What they fail to realize is that Christ said: 'I came not to destroy but to fulfill the law and the prophets.' Christianity has over the years undergone cultural transformation. Thus the form of Christianity inherited by Africans may not necessarily be the same Gospel preached by Christ and the same Christianity preached and practiced by the early Christians. Hence completely irrelevant to the Christian message summed up in love.<sup>240</sup>

According to Appiah-Kubi, he holds the position that culture, like religion grows with time and space. There is therefore the need for the radical adoption or adaptation and use of African culture in Christianity. We cannot and indeed do not advocate a blanket use of our various traditional cultures. Instead we advocate a critical selective use. We do not want to take a leap into our past and remain there but rather we want our past to inform and mature us into an honorable future. We should therefore maintain and

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<sup>239</sup> Appiah-Kubi *West African Initiation Rites*, 24.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 16.



retain all that is of value in our culture in the growth and development of our national, corporate, individual, socio-economic and religious life.<sup>241</sup>

Professors, Opoku, T.N.O. Quarcoopome and Dr. Appiah-Kubi couldn't have said it better. The cultural values of the various rites in the traditional initiation are now being seriously searched for and appreciated as in Sankofa. This is why I chose this subject matter as my demonstration project. Nsaguo is part of the African culture and traditional rites and should be thoroughly examined. This is just the beginning.

My multifaith track has transformed me in ways that I did not know could happen. I have become more appreciative of the laws of nature and of the spirituality in our culture. When I set out on this journey, I had a lot of questions and some of these questions are being answered. I realize that more research work needs to be done. The awareness should begin in earnest, the re-education will not only be for Ghanaians in the Diaspora but for the world to know and realize the richness of the culture.

I also realize that the impact of Christianity was not all negative. Some of the positive aspects are that human sacrifice has been done with such as when the Kings die, they are not buried with either their beloved wives neither are they buried with any of their servants. The awareness I have gained, has made me realize the fact that I should accept that the members of other faiths are part of the society and that we are in this world together.

I compare the diversity in life like looking at a rain forest and seeing all kinds of vegetation - there are huge trees, ferns, little plants, crawling vegetation, etc. All the vegetation lives in harmony in the rain forest; every plant, tree, fern has a part to play in

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<sup>241</sup>Appiah-Kubi, *West African Initiation Rites*, 16.

the rain forest. They all contribute to the ecosystem. Humanity should learn to live together in the same way. I should be grateful that there are countries with oil reserves that happen to be Muslim, I am also grateful that I am able to consume petroleum products despite my religious affiliation. We have to live together in this world in harmony.

When I understand what the other faiths stand for then I can accept and respect them for their existence, and will give them the respect that this is due them. To me understanding other faiths is key for me accepting another person's right to worship within their faith. Respecting the faiths of others gives me the understanding of their need to worship differently from me. Not having an understanding of the teachings of another faith may cause me to be judgmental. I will always try to accept and acknowledge the rights of individuals to make their own religious choice. I will respect their humanity and their God given right to exist as human beings. They have a right to live and worship in whatever faith/religion they choose based on their understanding and a right to have their choice respected.

I believe that God has given us enough love to share with people of other faiths so when I am interacting with others, God's love will come through in the way I interact with them. The love within me will ensure that I am forgiving; God's love in me is enough to ensure that I understand, and that I am accepting, appreciative and respectful of others. God demands that I come with no pre-conceived notions, that I come with an open heart and hand, a heart that is open to accept the members of other faiths. An open hand is accepting but a clenched fist bars all. A rain forest seems to have what embodies

the human and what God wants of me is the acceptance of all of humanity and to have - understanding, appreciation, acceptance, respect and love in the midst of other tensions.

The greatest influence on my scriptural interpretation is my culture. The way I live is dictated by who I am and what I believe in. My understanding of my culture strengthens my belief in my religion in spite of the tensions that come with it. My understanding and appreciation of my culture gives me the appreciation I need to respect the other faiths I encounter in life.

That is why I was on this quest, to learn and understand about particular rituals and festivals of the society I grew up in and to try to understand why some Ghanaian Christians avoid or reject them; and also to understand why Christianity has been used to vilify some aspects of the African culture is important to me. This is my pilgrimage, my quest to better understand aspects of my culture; which is my heritage, and hopefully a legacy to my children.

From my research, I have come to the conclusion that Nsaguo is a ritual that seeks to maintain communication between the ancestors and the human community of the Akan of Ghana. This demonstration project will seek to examine the practice of Nsaguo and argue that the practice is not antithetical to Christian theology; therefore it can be validly practiced by Traditionalists and Christians alike.

#### EVALUATION:

My team consists of the participants and my site team. They assessed the project and evaluated it. Assessment tools utilized were quantitative and qualitative analyses. The goals were achieved because of the pre and post questionnaires after the presentation at the Presbyterian Church at Providence Rhode Island. The words of the video presentation will be used in the handbook. The completed questionnaires, personal interviews and the journals utilized by participants will serve as a basis for the evaluation. The Site team will be asked to do the evaluation, and the criterion for the evaluation will be:

- a) To have a third of the participants/audience gain an understanding of what Nsaguo entails.
- b) Can a Christian perform the ritual of Nsaguo without the fear of having committed a sacrilege?

This study uses an idiographic approach to collect data on Nsaguo. This is a case study of beliefs and practices of Nsaguo in the Ghanaian community of Christians. I used two main methods:

- In-depth interviews with three different kinds of key informants. I will interview three different key informants including: practitioners, Christian Priests and Chiefs and Queen Mothers who are Christians, and
- Participant observation techniques.

In-depth interviews are flexible techniques that give the interviewer more freedom to direct the flow of conversation based on key themes. Participant observation is the

method of field research that allows the investigator to participate in the event or social phenomenon under study.

These methods allowed me to (1) describe the core process of Nsaguo and (2) compare the teachings of Christianity on Nsaguo and the practice of Nsaguo among Ghanaian Christians. To understand what Christian theology states about Nsaguo, I relied on the interpretive technique of hermeneutics to examine the words of the Nsaguo and the Psalms of Imprecation.

The results of the video showing were very informative. Through my research, there was transformation for me in that I realized what knowledge was needed in order to perform Nsaguo. I could understand now, why in some Ghanaian clans, not everyone can perform Nsaguo because of the information needed in the performance of the ritual. It has been educative in that I have gained a better understanding as to what I need to do daily every time I sit down to eat or drink. Remembering my ancestors has become an integral part of my life.



*Ananse Ntontan*  
*"spider's web" symbolizing wisdom, creativity*

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **THE RESEARCH**

*Inquiry saves one from blunders; he who will not inquire causes trouble to himself.*

#### **Methods and Approach**

My research took me to the motherland to interview the spokesmen of the Kings to find out exactly what they were saying. I had also heard that if one performed Nsaguo without the blessing of the family, there were negative things that could happen and had happened to those people. I also spoke to priests and pastors alike, to find out their reasoning for their opinions on Nsaguo.

My research was in the form of direct personal interviews, observations as well as utilizing the print media. Specifically I used books written by both African and European theologians and others whose work has a direct impact on my project. My research made me realize the amount of information available to aid me in my thesis. I have a better understanding of my culture and rituals to the point where I am really appreciative of where I am now, versus where I was when I started this research project.

One of the outcomes of this project is to produce a video as a legacy to those of us who would want to know how to perform Nsaguo in the right way. In order to gauge the impact of this educational video, I showed it to a church group and see what kind of feedback I would get – what kind of impact the video would have on the participants. The workshops will follow because there are two others that will be scheduled after the defense of my thesis. Some of the methodologies used are hermeneutics especially when

I compare the words of the Nsaguo to the Psalms of Imprecation. There was some contextualizing involved because I believe we tend to forget that aspect of the culture. I used the questionnaire received to tabulate my findings and come to my conclusions from the interviewing questions as well. I used quantitative methods to measure the effectiveness of the video on participants. I tested their knowledge of Nsaguo and the effect of the video on their understanding of and attitude about Nsaguo. The results are included as Appendix.....

I relied on several theologians one who had also written about my subject matter. This was very important to me because of the position he holds in the Catholic Church and that is Archbishop Peter Sarpong. I had the privilege of personally interviewing him.

The research questions were as follows: Historical, Theological, Social/Cultural and Educational.

## **Historical**

During my research, I found that I was not very informed about my own culture. There were certain aspects of my culture that I did not know about. I also found out that there were not many written sources for me to use and the sources that were useful to me were very hard to find. I was fortunate that NYTS has a relationship with Columbia because one of the important books/sources for my demonstration project and thesis was out of print and could only be located at Columbia.

Most of the information that was useful were written by Africans who face a problem of the lack of publication houses for their work. The sources I was able to find proved to be very useful.

Throughout my research, authors like my advisor Professor Opoku, John Mbiti, T.N.O. Quarcoopome, and Archbishop Sarpong all echoed the same sentiments, that African Spirituality was why Christianity took such a stronghold in Africa.

It was clear that most of the writers of African history had a bias – and probably did not quite understand the culture. Some of the writings of Benjamin Ray made me pause because of the way he interpreted historical events.

Credit, however must be given to some of these European/British colonial writers because they were quoted considerably by African authors mentioned before. Such a writer was Rattray because it was his documentation that helped some of our African writers to put certain things into context; even though his lack of understanding of the culture made for a particular European bias.

We also find that Christianity created tensions which divided communities and families and that problem still exists today. There were certain festivals and rituals which



were not clearly explained due to a lack of understanding on the part of the author. Other rituals and festivals were not given the merit they deserved because of the belief that anything African was not good. This created a problem for the youth who did not fully understand some aspects of their culture.

There are also interpretations of history in these festivals.

There is a paradoxical situation where on one hand the renewal ceremonies are meant to take society to an ideal time in the past when presumably society existed in some ideal form; on the other hand, the renewal is meant to ensure a more effective future. Dickson talks about a prayer at the Hogbetsotso Festival which is as follows:

I invoke you all, all the ancestors,  
You who trekked from far away Hogbe  
You who came and founded the State of Anlo,  
You who bore many fruits;  
I make an offering, asking for your guidance;  
We always call on you.  
We plead for peace, perfect peace  
Make evil fly over our heads, and goodness comes to all.  
We ask for peace, let there be rain,  
Let there be rain that peace may reign.  
And in all our chiefs, the little innocent ones,  
All our men, all women, every child of the soil,  
Bless them with unity; let their thoughts and word be one.  
Let the State be one, make it stand as one.  
Drive off evil to the desert beyond River Danyi,  
Drive it off to the deserts beyond the sea,  
To the deserts beyond the lagoon, drive it far away;  
Rest the state in peace, yes in peace, perfect peace.

## **Theological**

The concept of Nsaguo as the challenge statement states is a form of communication with our ancestors. As was stated earlier, to become an ancestor means you must have led a good and moral life; because not everyone can be an ancestor. The Akan community is made up of the living, the dead and the unborn and so the ancestors are considered to be a part of the living community.

What makes us living human beings is the part of the Creator in us, a divine spark that links every human being directly to God. This is where our real selfhood is rooted, and this part of us is never separated from its source. There is an inward sense of union with a presence that is eternal and that explains African ideas and relationships with the ancestors; for it means that there is something in us that never dies and those who die therefore continue to live and remain members of their families and communities.

Similarly, saints are part of the Christian psyche, Saints are prayed to all over the world because they supposedly performed miracles similar to Christ and his apostles – if the belief is that Christ gave the charge for healing and deliverance to occur, Christians who are imbued with the Holy Spirit have these healing powers. The same principles that are applied to saints can be applied to ancestors, however, because our ancestors are of the African Traditional Religion, that aspect of reverence is deemed ‘worship’.

As a congregational prayer, Nsaguo is openly communicated for the general public to hear when it’s being performed in a community setting. Just as privacy is sought when the choosing of the papacy begins and ends, so are some Nsaguo activities not available for the public domain. There are more Nsaguo prayers said to the hearing of the general public than not. When one goes to church and is asked to pray, no one

really knows what they are praying for. That is usually between the person and God or Christ as the case may be.

Some theologians still see African Traditional Religion, as paganistic as was clearly stated at the African Jewry conference in October of 2010. One of the speakers made the statement that the new word for African fetishism is African Traditional Religion.

The reason why I compared the words of the prayer of Nsaguo to that of the Psalms of Imprecation is that many 'born again' Christians claim that the reason why they are against Nsaguo is that it calls on God to wreak havoc on their enemies. When you read the Psalms of Imprecation, you realize that what David is asking God in the Psalms are not that different from what the Nsaguo performers are asking God to do; so why the difference – because this is part of the African culture and is therefore not of God? Nsaguo is used for community activities as well as national activities. It is part of the African culture, it is part of the African religion, it is part of African Theology. Here are some parts of Psalm 109:

<sup>8</sup> May his days be few;  
may another take his place of leadership.

<sup>9</sup> May his children be fatherless  
and his wife a widow.

<sup>10</sup> May his children be wandering beggars;  
may they be driven <sup>[d]</sup> from their ruined homes.

<sup>11</sup> May a creditor seize all he has;  
may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor.

<sup>12</sup> May no one extend kindness to him  
or take pity on his fatherless children.

<sup>13</sup> May his descendants be cut off,  
their names blotted out from the next generation.

An example of one ritual that predates Christianity that has the same concept as in  
Matthew 5:23-24:

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your  
brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before  
the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother and sister, and then  
come and offer your gift.....

This Peace Ritual will celebrate 500 years in 2015 which shows that the spirit of  
peacefulness existed in the Ghanaian community prior to the advent of Christianity. This  
Ritual, which is part of the overall Festival of Ohum, was organized by the community, to  
bring peace and harmony.

## **Social/Cultural**

The performance of Nsaguo is a very important ritual in every social and cultural activity in the Akan community. It is also a part of the Ghanaian culture as there is no official function that does not include the performance of Nsaguo and even though the advent of Christianity created a chasm where seemed that the Traditionalists and the Christians could not cross that divide; the fact that Nsaguo is performed at national events shows the acceptance of the nation that it is part of the socio-cultural aspects of society.

The Asafosa Peace Ritual is a social/cultural activity. The Durbar is the culmination of the festivities of the Ohum festival. At the Asafosa Peace Ritual, there is a somber atmosphere where the town is making sure that all issues/disputes are resolved. There is a coming together of the town to discuss steps for the new year of the town. The attire worn is that which is worn for a funeral. The durbar on the other hand, is a very festive affair to end the week-long Ohum festival.

The traditional marriage is also considered a social and cultural affair; so are all the significant points in the life of a person in the Akan community. Even the staunchest of Christians reverts to the tradition and culture when time comes for him/her to get married. They still ask to go through the 'traditional' form of marriage, which starts with the 'knocking' – where the man identifies himself to the family of the woman that he is the one who is dating her and should the family have any questions, they can come and ask him. That is the first step in the marriage process, the second step being the traditional marriage –or engagement where the two families come together in a show of appreciation and celebration.

The ancestors are remembered and invited to be a part of these celebrations because they are still considered to be part of the community.

The effect I hope will happen is that people will take the time to find out about their culture and that of other cultures and be appreciative and respectful of them. The effect of this will give people a better appreciation of other cultures and hopefully even help them in their own spirituality.

The moral issues at stake here are the people being true to themselves and their conscience. The issue here is about not being hypocritical when praying. I am dealing with a congregational prayer and a remembrance of the ancestors. What I hope will happen is that people will become more open and genuine in the way they pray. They may have a better understanding that being honest in your prayer makes you a better Christian. Using the example of the psalms of imprecation, it becomes obvious that God does not frown on genuine prayers, as Christians if we use the Psalms when we pray, it should not be a problem when a congregational prayer such as Nsaguo prays for the minds of their enemies to be changed towards the.

The location of the Ghanaians in the Diaspora in a way has strengthened their practice in the performance of Nsaguo. They have become even more cognizant of the fact that their culture is an important part of who they are. In order not to forget who and what they are, they make sure that they follow the traditions as closely as they can. It appears that the Ghanaians in the Diaspora are even more appreciative of their culture than those at home on the continent. The people in the Diaspora feel a need to connect with the motherland and so make sure that what they remember of the tradition is carried out as best they can.

The advent of Christianity and the current beliefs, practices and the utterances of some of the Ghanaian priests are creating problems both at home and in the Diaspora. Socially, The Ghanaians in the Diaspora are trying hard to adhere to the culture they know. When we first came to the States, there was no social occasion that you would attend where the attendees were in traditional clothes.

Somewhere along the way, things changes and now there is no social function that people do not wear traditional clothes. Ghanaians in the Diaspora wear the traditional clothes to church on Sunday even in winter and especially to other social functions such as child naming traditional engagement etc. Psychologically, Ghanaians in the Diaspora feel the need to connect to keep up with their culture and traditions and this need has lead to the enquiries into what some rituals mean.

Initially, Ghanaians in the Diaspora were hesitant in putting on their traditional clothes. Part of it was due to their immigration status. Now that many of the Ghanaians are naturalized, even those who do not have the legal immigrant status do not feel threatened if they wear their traditional clothes to church or other social activities. Tensions about that have eased considerably. This was the main problem which prohibited a lot of the Ghanaians in the Diaspora from performing the different rituals.

It is becoming more and more important to the Ghanaians that there needs to be more exposure. People have started talking about, and African day parade similar to that of the Caribbean Day – a day for others to really see Ghanaians and their culture first hand. Racial profiling had been a problem but I believe that all that has diminished considerably. The exposure of the culture to others such as Americans both African

American and White Americans is contributing to the edification of others about the tradition and culture; thus changing the landscape.

As Dr. Appiah-Kubi put it so aptly that culture, like religion grows with time and space. There is therefore the need for the radical adoption or adaptation and use of African culture in Christianity. We cannot and indeed do not advocate a blanket use of our various traditional cultures. Instead we advocate a critical selective use. We do not want to take a leap into our past and remain there but rather we want our past to inform and mature us into an honorable future. We should therefore maintain and retain all that is of value in our culture in the growth and development of our national, corporate, individual, socio-economic and religious life.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup>Appiah-Kubi *West African Initiation Rites*, 16.



## **Educational**

My project has proved to be a very educational project for both me and my family. It has given me a better understanding of some aspects of my culture and given me the impetus to know more. I believe this quest of mine is for the edification of not only me and my family, but for the world as a whole.

People learn in so many different ways. Some learn through experience, some learn through watching others, still others learn by being taught in a classroom – formally. There are many ways of learning and part of learning is also visual.

There have been lots of books written about Africa and African religion. Many derogatory names have been attributed to the African Traditional Religion. This has been taught, read about and absorbed not only by Africans but by people all over the world. It has taken some time for this ‘damage’ to be done and it will take some time for the ‘damage’ to be undone but the damage needs to be corrected.

Part of the way of correcting this erroneous perception is to take people to visit African to see and experience these rituals and festivals for themselves. Another way is to bring the rituals and festivals to the people, by the people. We, as Africans have to show our pride in our tradition and culture. We should not be scared about educating people about who and what we are. This should be our quest. We may not be able to change all minds, but it will not be for the lack of trying.

We as Africans need to be proud of our culture and heritage and have to provide this education to our children. This is the reason for producing an educational video as one of the outcomes of this demonstration project. There will also be a handbook to go along with it.

I realized during my research that a lot of education needs to be done and it is up to us to do it. When you ask fellow Ghanaians why they do not believe in Nsaguo, the reasons given are mostly because the deities are called and that enemies are ‘cursed’; but when you bring up the point about the Psalms of imprecation, they seem nonplussed because their thinking has always been that so long as the Psalms are in the Bible, everything that is stated in the Bible is from God so cannot be wrong. There is a certain naiveté, that some of us operate in. We read just enough books to get us by, we do not understand or appreciate the fact that we need to put the Bible in context. We do not seem to realize there are a lot of allegorical events in the Bible and most of us take everything the Bible says literally.

Thus Traditional Religion is threatened by urbanization, industrialization, education, Western medicine, foreign religious and shortage of adherents. But in spite of all these devastating forces against the Traditional Religion, it appears to another school of thought that the traditional faith will persist in the face of all odds. There appears to be a new growing awareness of the need to keep and preserve the religion of our forefathers by concerned educated Africans. Such awareness stems from the prominent place given to African Traditional Religion in the educational system.<sup>243</sup>



*Asaase yɛ duru*  
*the Earth has weight" Symbolizing the divinity of Mother Earth*

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<sup>243</sup>Appiah-Kubi *West African Initiation Rites*, 16.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES**

*If speech constructs the village, silence builds the world.*

On March 15<sup>th</sup> my site team met to discuss the assessment process and make a decision on the competencies they felt I would need to complete my demonstration project. I had given the site team members the information on their responsibilities as well as what needed to be done for the competencies. I went over the requirements for the competency assessment and gave each member of the site team an opportunity to go over the requirements and the competencies. After that the group discussed the requirements as well as the competencies and then each member was asked to take time and make their decision based on their knowledge of me as they have come to know me in the capacity of the work I do at St Christopher's.

Each site team member selected competencies they felt I needed to focus on. There was a discussion as to why those picks were made and finally, a consensus was reached as to which three competencies the site team would go with as the following three competencies. The research that went into this demonstration project had a profound impact on the three competencies selected.

## **Multifaith leader**

A leader is one who creates an environment in which a variety of gifts may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts, and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the sensitivity to share resources.

The site team felt that this was an area I needed to continue and develop because it is very necessary in the ministry I am undertaking. The multifaith leader makes sure s/he has an understanding of other religious faiths.

During the course of getting ready for my demonstration project, I decided to add my colleague, Rabbi Jo David to my site team. Her inclusion opened new awareness not only for me but for the Institute for Diasporan and African Culture (TIDAC). Rabbi Jo was invited to go with me as a site team member to Ghana to witness my demonstration project. Though this TIDAC discovered a Ghanaian Jewish community, leading us to have a Shabbat service as part of the demonstration project.

Through that, we also attended a conference on “African Jewry” where we learnt of the Lema in South Africa, who’s DNA could be traced to the lost tribes of Israel.

## **Organizer**

A community organizer is more than someone who can create the grounds for social change. A community organizer is one who learns the community, and helps the community come to know itself. Organizing is a task that everyone in ministry must engage in some way. Multifaith community organizing entails a special ability to organize not within but across religious boundaries in ways that cross them responsibly while empowering people to work together for change that will bring a greater measure of common good.

The site team members felt that my organizing skills would become even more important as I grow in the ministry and so it was important that I continue to develop this skill to maximize my effectiveness. It was important for me to develop this skill because the challenges presented by working or interacting with members of other religious faiths and dealing with the cultural issues that become part of the equation.

Through the demonstration project, I realize that my skills as an organizer are being honed in even more. There is a sense of making sure that everyone who is a part of the group or activity is comfortable. Achieving this degree of comfort by organizing activities in a way that makes the group/participants feel they have a voice in what is going on. By being aware and respecting the diversity and differences, you make participants relaxed enough for them to contribute towards the activity.

## **Facilitating Transformation**

My site team was very excited when I invited them to share in this journey with me. The excitement came from the fact that they saw this as an opportunity for them to learn. I had become an agent of transformation to them giving them a chance to see and learn new things; and this was an opportunity for them to change.

To develop this competency, I had to make sure I had sufficient knowledge of what I was working with and to do this, I had to educate myself in the components of NsaGu (Nsaguo). The research I undertook and the interviews I conducted gave me enough information to get me ready to answer questions on and about the project.

As an agent of transformation, I educated myself in the components of NsaGu through research and the personal interviews I conducted in Ghana with the Okyeames, the Kings and others helped me understand Nsaguo and the part it played in their lives. I also interviewed retired Catholic Archbishop Rev. Dr. Peter Sarpong who wrote the first book on the subject of my demonstration project. It was very important for me to interview Rev. Dr Peter Sarpong because of the diametrically opposite views about the subject of Nsaguo.

In inviting a Jewish Rabbi to be a part of my site team, I was hoping that three things would happen, 1) She would contribute her knowledge of presentation to my demonstration project, 2) through her, I would learn more about the Jewish faith and beliefs and to see where there are similarities if any to my culture and 3) that there will be reciprocity for her in that she would also learn about my culture and gain a better understanding of the culture and traditions.

What I did not realize was the magnitude of the impact this invitation would have on all of us. I see that transformation in myself and in Jo as well. Jo started thinking out her own proverbs after meeting my advisor Prof. Kofi Asare Opoku. She realized how important proverbs were especially when used in everyday language as our conversations and speech had a tendency of doing.

I hope I have been an agent of transformation for my site team member Kathy Berney who wants to see the video and the handbook because she wants to perform Nsaguo.

Rev. Chris Foster of Providence Presbyterian Church in Providence, Rhode Island also underwent some transformation, inviting me to come over and make a presentation to her congregation because she recognized the importance and relevance of Nsaguo in our lives.



*Dwennimmen symbolizing humility and strength*

## APPENDICES

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## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **Site Team Analysis**

In June 2009 after the intensive, I contacted my site team to set up a meeting to discuss the challenge statement. There were a few questions from the site team members who had not heard about the topic for my demonstration project and so I had to give the site team members information pertaining to why I chose that particular subject matter. Many of the site team members were intrigued by the idea of Nsaguo and wanted to know more. I explained to them the tensions that currently exist and discussed a few of the comparable rituals of libation in the Bible.

I was very fortunate to have picked an advisor who is well conversant in the performance of Nsaguo, Professor Kofi Asare Opoku, who became the Chairperson of my Site team.

To start me off on the right track, my advisor made the following statements:

Through libation contact is established between the spiritual and the human, material or physical world. But who says there is only one way of doing so?

Libation expresses the African belief that the dead are not dead and that the dead continue to live as members of their families/communities and that the living can communicate with them.

Since death does not terminate human relationships, the dead, who are members of their families/communities, are invited through libation, to come and participate in the on-going activities/events in the families/communities.

The dead ancestors live close to God/Supreme Being and function as our intermediaries; and since they have lived here on earth before, they understand our problems and can relay them to God/Supreme Being, and that is why we call on them during libations. The prayers in libations are meant to pass through them to God/Supreme Being.

When some people start pouring libation they say and I quote: "Osor nsa! (the Sky have a drink) Asase nsa! (Mother Earth have a drink)". By saying so, we are calling on the heavens and the earth or earth and sky, the two great fructifying forces in the universe

which come together to sustain human life on earth. What is wrong in acknowledging our dependence on these great forces that sustain our life on planet earth?

Libation is also an act of remembrance and sharing. Through it the living share food and drink with the dead. Why should we forget our dead simply because we have been converted to Christianity?

This introduction to the subject matter gave me the impetus to move in the right direction.

A site team member who is a practicing Shaman was very excited about this subject matter because it is something she has been interested in for some time now and the following were her comments about the thesis: I feel the aspects of one's culture, traditions, and spirituality are extremely important, and a treasure to be preserved and cherished, especially in time of Diaspora. I feel that the spirituality, traditions, and the stories that come out of one's culture have a large part in leading us to that innate connection with God, which all of us have from the moment of birth. I can't help but think that reconnecting with and preserving these things not only enriches one's spiritual path, but in a situation in which the community has been uprooted and scattered, these connections can also bring a measure of comfort, reassurance, and healing.

Rev. Dr. Nyante, another member of my site team had this to say about the demonstration project: Libation/Nsaguo has always been an issue in discussions at my church, Bethel Presbyterian Reformed Church. We invited an expert to my church and my pastor, Rev. Samuel Atiemo did not have a problem with the expert coming to explain to the congregation, but he had his reservations about the tradition as a whole and it seemed that most of the elders at my church agreed with him.

All the presenter was saying is you cannot make judgments based on ignorance. You need to understand it before making a judgment of the value system. At the

inauguration of TIDAC, my pastor again reiterated his condemnation of libation and some of our church members were hoping that he would listen to what others had to say. So it is interesting to know that we are doing research into something that seems to be very controversial and hopefully, we can learn something from this research.

Other site team members who did not know anything about the subject were eager to learn. In all they wholeheartedly endorsed the selection especially when we related it to some of the rituals performed in the Bible.

“NSAGUO or LIBATION”

NEW YORK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Doctor of Ministry

**EVA I. SHAW-TAYLOR**

**NOVEMBER 19, 2009**

Challenge Statement

Nsaguo (Libation) is a ritual that seeks to maintain communication between the spirit world and the human worlds in the Akan Culture of Ghana. Some Ghanaian Christians in the Diaspora and some members of the congregation of Akropong Christ Church believe the practice of Nsaguo is antithetical to Christian belief. This demonstration project will seek to educate and effectively change the attitudes of Ghanaian Christians and others about the meaning of Nsaguo.

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## **Preface**

We have heard of the adage the road to heaven is paved with good intentions and I say that the path to knowledge is paved with a lot of questions..... This is quest – my pilgrimage of sorts with my need to know, is driving me.

We are all on a journey in one way or another.....I have had a lot of questions about my life. Some have been answered along the way, others are still unfolding. My ethnicity has played a role in my journey. As an African who was brought up within the African/Ghanaian culture, I learned to appreciate my culture first and so it is up to me to show the world how much my culture means to me. Some of the questions I have are: why was I born an African, a Ghanaian? Why am I here? Why do we dress differently? What is Christianity? Why did we accept Christianity? Why do we accept the culture of another to the detriment of our own? Jesus was humble, so why are some born again Christians so arrogant?

My culture is who and what I am; my culture is very heavily entrenched in my being, so why should I accept the culture of another to the detriment of my own? Why did the missionaries deem some of our cultural practices to be antithetical to Christianity? Why am I allowing someone else to dictate how I should view my culture? What existed before Christianity? Why are priests so politically vocal? Were Africans aware of a higher authority before the missionaries? Why is African Traditional Religion (ATR) still in existence? Why? Why? Why?

Christianity was imposed upon us by our parents without us giving much thought to what it meant; we did not choose the religion we wanted or what faith to believe in; we were born into it. The Christian religion was a by product of colonization

by Europe; but the African Traditional Religion is still being practiced in Ghana.

Christianity by way of colonization did not completely take over the culture; however it created some tensions within the traditions and culture of the people and one of the tensions is what I am looking to explore.

I now read the scriptures in a different way sometimes asking myself why we have had to succumb to the indoctrination of the missionaries, to our detriment, to the extent that we feel that our culture is inferior and that some of the rituals in our culture are against Christianity. My culture and my consciousness have made me realize the fact that there is diversity in worship, and there is diversity of religions; however, ultimately, we worship the same God Almighty.

What I realize is that Christianity is one form of worship of God through Jesus Christ, His Son; so when the Muslims claim that Jesus is a prophet just as Mohammed is a prophet, who am I to dispute their beliefs? For Muslims, God does not share divinity with any other being or person. I know through my research that the concept of the Trinity was man-made; that the Nicene Creed that we, Episcopalians, recite every Sunday in Church was created out of the Treaty of Nicaea, but we all worship a Supreme Being - God. Why then, will practicing the African Traditional Religion be sinful in God's eyes? My interpretation of the scriptures makes me believe that my culture is something that I have to hang onto and not lose because that makes me more humane, that makes me more spiritual; and that makes me more receptive of the fact that Jesus Christ could have been God's son indeed. I say "could have" because of the lessons Jesus taught. His was a simple life, lacking material wealth; he lived a nomadic life, moving from place to place -

people like Mother Teresa, an Albanian, who through her belief in Jesus Christ moved to India to give of herself in the work that she did.

My social class influences my interpretation of my religion's scriptures. I have the opportunity, the ability and the resources to research, understand, and put scripture readings into context. I am able to put readings into perspective, to interpret them and not to take some of these readings literally. My level of education gives me privileges and opportunities not available to everyone in my community.

In the United States and Ghana, I see how the poor and the marginalized flock to some of the "charismatic churches" listening to the interpretation of the scriptures by different pastors. They put the pastors on a pedestal almost as high as God, some go to church just because of the pastor. Not having the resources for their own interpretation, they rely on the interpretation of the pastor of the church; often accepting his or her interpretation as the right one. They identify with the pastor who states/interprets the Bible in the way they (the pastors) would like the congregation to believe it.

The mix of uses of my religion's scripture to which I am currently being exposed is influencing my scriptural interpretation. I am beginning to really take a good look at my culture to see how and why Christian missionaries tried hard to get rid of certain aspects of the Ghanaian culture. When I read a particular passage, I try to look at it culturally to see whether it is in line with my cultural experience. This is something I had not been doing before.

When my sister and I first came to the United States, it was with the objective that we were coming to get educated and go back to Ghana; because of this, most Ghanaians with the same idea did not fully assimilate into the American society – always straddling



two continents and not fully belonging to either. Even though you felt more comfortable with your culture because you had been living it before you came to the United States, when you go back home, you are looked upon as not “doing things right” culturally. It was only natural that one would adopt some of the American culture without realizing just how “Americanized” one has become; but the yearning for one’s culture never goes away.

One’s culture is very important because it provides the framework for how one lives. Worshipping as an Anglican gives me some private time to pray and be silent in the presence of God. That is important to me and my scriptural interpretation. My private devotions and my active exploration into finding out more about African Traditional Religion and other faith religions, is broadening my thinking and making me review how I understand some passages and some situations in the scriptures.

I believe that what God demands from me is understanding, appreciation, acceptance, respect and love of others. I believe that God expects me to understand what other faiths are and what their faith is about, and to also accept that not everyone in this world is or will be a Christian. Using the tower of Babel as an example, one realizes that we are all God’s creatures and have to learn to co-exist with each other. To understand is to have knowledge about other faiths even though you may not agree with their principles or beliefs. In order to have peace and harmony, I have to educate myself about the other faiths to learn to understand them.

With my understanding of the different faiths, I will learn to appreciate their need to have that faith and to accept our differences. If I come from the point of view that Jews were here before Christians, then it stands to reason that I should be accepting of

them and anyone else; what I mean is that before I can condemn any religion, I have to understand that religion enough to know which aspects of that religion I either accept or reject. It does not disturb me that others do not profess the Christian faith because as I said, some of these religions predate Christianity.

To me, part of the problems we have in this world now is the fact that not only are we not accepting of people of other faiths, but we tend to be judgmental about them without actually understanding them. If people are accepting or at least respectful of the rights of others to choose the religion that best fulfills their spiritual needs, we will be getting somewhere in our quest for peace in this world.

I should accept the fact that the members of the other faiths are in this world with me that we are in this world together. I look at a rain forest and I see all kinds of vegetation - there are huge trees, ferns, little plants, crawling vegetation, etc. All the vegetation live in harmony in the rain forest; every plant, tree, fern has a part to play in the rain forest. They all contribute to the ecosystem. Humans should learn to live together in the same way. I should be grateful that there are countries with oil reserves that happen to be Muslim, I am also grateful that I am able to consume this oil even though I happen to be Christian. We have to live together in this world.

When I understand what the other faith stands for and I am accepting of them and their existence, I will give them the respect that this is due them. To me understanding another faith is key for me accepting another person's right to worship within that faith. It is necessary because then I would understand why the person has that need to worship differently from me. Not liking the teachings of another faith does not mean I should disrespect the members; not understanding may cause me to be judgmental. I will always

try to accept and acknowledge the rights of individuals to make their own religious choice. Respect that they are human just as I am, respect that they have rights. They have a right to live, a right to have whatever faith/religion they choose and a right to have their choice respected.

I believe that God expects me to have enough love to share with people of other faiths so when I am interacting with them, the love will come through in the way I interact with them. The love within me will ensure that I am forgiving; God will expect me to have enough love that will ensure that I understand, that I am accepting, appreciative and respectful.

God demands that I come with no pre-conceived notions, that I come with an open heart and hand, a heart that is open to accept the members of other faiths. An open hand is accepting but a clenched fist bars all. When I envision a rain forest, I see the best example humans can have that embodies all of what God would want me to have when I meet people of other faiths - understanding, appreciation, acceptance, respect and love in the midst of other tensions. The greatest influence on my scriptural interpretation is my culture. The way I live is dictated by who I am and what I believe in. My belief in my culture strengthens my belief in my religion. My understanding and appreciation of my culture will give me the appreciation I need to respect other faiths.

That is why I am on this quest – to learn about particular rituals and festivals of Ghana and to try to understand why some Ghanaian Christians avoid or reject them; and to understand why Christianity has been used to vilify some aspects of the African culture. This is my pilgrimage, my quest to better understand my culture; this is my heritage, my legacy to my children.....

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING:

If you want to speak to God, speak to the winds<sup>244</sup>

Africans are very religious and believe that God Almighty is everywhere. As Professor Kofi Asare Opoku so aptly put it “A close observation of Africa and its societies will reveal that religion is at the root of African culture and is the determining principle of African life.”<sup>245</sup> “The idea of God as the Creator of the world and man, and as the final authority in all matters is native to Africa and not as some early writers on the subject asserted, of foreign origin”.<sup>246</sup> The knowledge of God seems to be fundamental in everything that an African does. The African stands in awe of everything God created and does not seek to find ways and means of discovering how God created these, but seeks to live in harmony with nature. Many people who are considered spiritual tend to live very simple lives; in sync with nature and as the Ethiopian proverb simply puts it: “We do not see God, we only see His works”<sup>247</sup>.

Africans, in order not to upset the balance of power, created stories to explain why there are taboos about certain things in nature and some of the stories we are told are about how the world came into existence. In Ghana there is a saying that: “No one teaches a child who God is” it is almost as if you are born with an innate spiritualism that no one can take away from your childhood. Ghanaians who lived in the Gold Coast are

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<sup>244</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku, *Speak to the Winds: Proverbs from Africa* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Company, 1975), 50.

<sup>245</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Lagos: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), 1.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>247</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1975), 212.

very spiritual, open-minded and welcoming people. Ghana has been described by many travelers that it is one of the most welcoming countries on the continent of Africa. Many of my colleagues, in the non-profit world, tell me that they always make sure they go through Ghana every time they have to travel to Africa on business. The forts that are strewn along the coastal landscape show the hospitality of the people of Ghana. They gave away the lands that enabled the traders to build these forts at the various communities.

According to Reverend Dr. Joseph W. Apuri, the African Biblical Scholar is often amazed at the great similarities that exist between the African life ethos and the life situation of the Hebrews of the Old Testament.<sup>248</sup> It is important to note that the African life ethos that he is referring to is not the Christian life ethos but rather the cultural life ethos of the African before Christianity.

According to John Mbiti, Africans who live by the African Traditional Religion are very religious. Religion has been for Africans, the normal way of looking at the world and experiencing life itself. Since African Religion belongs to the people, when Africans migrate in large numbers from one part of the continent to another or from Africa to other continents, they take religion with them.<sup>249</sup>

Ghanaians have long accepted and encouraged diverse religious traditions living side by side in their communities. These traditions continued through the modern period as Africans converted to Christianity. According to the website of the Department of

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<sup>248</sup>Joseph W. Apuri, "Similarities between Jewish Old Testament and African Traditional Culture" in *The Evangelizing Mission of The Church in West Africa* ed. H.A. Adigwe, 8-14 (Lagos: AWACC Publications, 1993), 8.

<sup>249</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion*, 14.

State, the religious make up of Ghana is stated as follows: Christianity 69%, Muslim 16% and African Traditional Religion 15%<sup>250</sup>. That means that neither the missionaries nor the Muslims were able to eradicate what they saw as the “paganistic” ways of Ghanaians. When the missionaries came to Ghana, they did not take time to understand Ghanaian cultural activities: rituals, festivals and so they wanted to get rid of our “anti-Christian” ways due to a lack of understanding of the culture. Throughout history, we find that the missionaries encouraged the people to attend worship services through bribery. Those who attended would be given gifts of European clothes and shoes. The children were encouraged not to associate with the non-believers. The missionaries went a step further and encouraged “servants” of households, palaces etc to leave their servitude to become servants of Christ “because in Christ we are all equal” - was their reasoning, even though that was not entirely true.

With these tactics, they were able to convert some factions of the communities who had issues with each other. One such example, was that of David Asante - who was of the royal household but was embittered because his side of the family was not the ruling side and so after he was converted, David Asante sought to wreak havoc against his cousin the King to the extent that he, David Asante, was finally banished from the Eastern Region for his over zealousness. Some of the indigenous people “refused” to be attracted by the material things the missionaries gave to the people - choosing instead to remain true to their culture and religion. They are the people who still practice the African Traditional Religion today because they have always believed in God as the Supreme Being.

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<sup>250</sup> <http://www.state.gov>

“I am a Ghanaian first and foremost before a Muslim” said Hajara Muhammad, a Muslim woman who was part of the team for The Institute for Diasporan and African Culture (TIDAC) formed as part of the demonstration project of Reverend Daniel Nyante, a doctoral candidate at the New York Theological Seminary; and this is a sentiment expressed by many Ghanaians, both Christian and Muslim. Even though in the Muslim World, many women have held high scholarly positions<sup>251</sup>, in the Northern region of Ghana, the girl child was not, according to Hajara, included in the education of children or being taught the Qur’an and even though Hajara is a Muslim, she puts her culture first before her religion so when she has a baby, the child naming ceremony in the traditional sense will occur first. She has no problem participating in cultural activities because she believes in her culture.

According to Smart and Denny, the spread of Islam in Africa started through conquest, trade, migration and missionary activities and by the tenth century.<sup>252</sup> Like Christianity, Islam is a religion of conversion but it was spread in Africa by Africans and was never associated with nineteenth-century colonialism.<sup>253</sup> Contrary to Christianity, Islam accepts polygamy and conversion follows upon the ritualized recitation of a profession of faith rather than upon a lengthy process of education and training. Islamic religious culture also shares many epistemological and practical features with non-Muslim African religious practice.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> <http://www.wikipedia.com> : “Women in Islam”

<sup>252</sup> Ninian Smart and Frederick Denny, *Atlas of the World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 202.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

Professor Kofi Asare Opoku, in his book, “West African Traditional Religion” talks about the tensions between the African Christian and his culture. The introduction of Islam and Christianity, as well as the impingement of the modern world, has all brought their influences to bear on traditional religion and culture in Africa. But although traditional religion and the culture it undergirded have been shaken by outside influences, they have not been completely overthrown, for they continue to play an important part in the lives of many Africans.<sup>255</sup> Many converts revert to the old religion in times of crisis, for they still have faith in the old, tested and proven sources of succour at such times, and resort to them does not constitute apostasy.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore many traditional institutions have continued to exist side by side with the new.

This is very common in most religions, even when there is not a clearly identified alternate cultural religion. Very often, the folk traditions are those associated with women’s practices such as cross cultural, cross religious practice in the Mediterranean countries to tie something red to the cradle of a new born to ward off evil spirits. This can be found in Israel among Jews and Arabs in Italy and Northern Africa.<sup>257</sup>

An example of this is marriage. With the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of colonial governments, new forms of marriage were introduced. African Christians can now marry in the church and have Christian weddings or they can marry according to ordinance. Yet for most West Africans either form of marriage must still be validated by the traditional marriage procedure. Thus the ceremony in church or at the

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<sup>255</sup> Opoku, *Traditional Religion*, 167

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>257</sup> Conversations with Rabbi Jo David



court has become icing on the cake.<sup>258</sup> African culture is rooted in our spirituality and our spirituality in our culture; we cannot separate the two. These relationships, we believe in transcend the living realm as we know it; that is why there is a Ghanaian idiom that says:

The cock in drinking water, raises its head to God in thankfulness.<sup>259</sup>

African religion cannot trace its roots to one person the way Christianity can trace its roots to Jesus Christ, or Muslims to Muhammad or the Buddhists to Buddha. African Traditional Religion grew out of the social mores of the African societies; it evolved slowly through many countries as people responded to the situations of their lives and reflected upon their experiences. Religious ideas and practices arose and took shape in the process of man's search for answers to these questions and ways of making human life safe and better.<sup>260</sup> Mbiti believes that many factors such as the geographical environment of the African as well as the change of seasons, the powers of nature, e.g. thunderstorms etc., epidemics, diseases, births and deaths and major historical events such as war, locust invasions, famine, migration etc., all contributed to the development of the African Traditional Religion.<sup>261</sup>

It seems that everywhere African Religion originated, the people adapted it to their situations. The African Religion is pragmatic and realistic and is applied as needed. Having no sacred scriptures or holy books, African Religion is thought to be written in the hearts and experiences of the people - moving with them through the times through

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<sup>258</sup> Opoku, *Traditional Religion*, 168

<sup>259</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion*, 212

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. 16.

the oral tradition. There are no religious controversies connected to African Religion, neither can we tell what the practice was 500 years ago.<sup>262</sup> Just as the Torah and Jewish Law unites all Jews the unifying factors that unite Africans in the study of their religion is the belief in one Supreme God and the spirituality in all that God has created..

According to Jacob K. Olupona,

It is quite evident that African traditional religion plays an important role in shaping the character of African society and culture today. Yet, this tradition continues to suffer from lack of acceptance and inadequate understanding of its central tenets and essence. The two monotheistic traditions, Islam and Christianity, to which most Africans have converted over the century, have developed a hostile attitude to this tradition; Islam relegates it to *al-Jahilliyya*, the time of barbarism, and Christianity views it as pure paganism.<sup>263</sup>

African Religion has been called by many names such as, superstition, paganism, fetishism, and ancestor worship. An examination reveals that these different names do not adequately describe African Traditional Religion.

Superstition is defined as a belief or practice or rite held in spite of evidence to the contrary, resulting from ignorance of the laws of nature or from faith in magic or chance. African religion should not be known as superstition because it is a practical and realistic religion. It is based on deep reflections and long experiences; it is also based on social mores. All religions accommodate some level of superstitious belief. However, “patriarchal” religions often level unfair criticism at native religions for their superstitious beliefs. This is true of the attitudes more of Christianity than Islam towards

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<sup>262</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion*. 17.

<sup>263</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1991), 1.

African Traditional Religion based on how these two religions have treated the native Ghanaians who still practice ATR.

Christianity, Islam and Judaism have their superstitions as well, but the superstitions in these three religions are not referred to as negatively as the superstitions in African Religion. Every February 2, is Groundhog Day where a groundhog is brought out in Pennsylvania; if the groundhog sees its shadow - there will be 6 more weeks of winter. If it does not see its shadow, spring is around the corner. There is also the belief in rabbit's foot for good luck; or kissing under a mistletoe for love.....

African religion is also known as animism which is a system of beliefs and practices based on the idea that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by spirits or souls. African people tell stories about these spirits and the stories constitute some of their beliefs. Christianity and Islam should be known as animism because there is an acknowledgement of the existence of spirits - but when it pertains to Africans, the reference made is derogatory and negative.<sup>264</sup>

African Religion has also been referred to as fetishism. Africans believe that there is “something” stronger than the ordinary human being – a force, power or energy in the universe which can be tapped by those who know how to do so and this power can be used for good or evil towards other people.<sup>265</sup> Fetishism is a derivative of the Portuguese fetico word used to describe the charms worn by the people of West Africa. As Mary Kingsley stated when she said: “When I say juju or fetish, I mean the religion of

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<sup>264</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion*, 18-19.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

the natives of West Africa”.<sup>266</sup> The fact that West Africans wear charms does not mean they believe that these charms have “power in them.

African Religion is found everywhere – in the wind, in the Sun, in the clouds, in the rain the forest and the vegetation because according to African Religion, God, can be found anywhere and everywhere. Africans believe that God is fundamental to their being. Their belief stems from the fact that they feel that there has to be a higher being that created the “wonderful” world we live in. Within the African Traditional Religion, there are rites and rituals that are performed. One of such rites is Nsaguo – called “libation” for a lack of any other descriptive word. Because of the performance of these rites, some people have referred to the African Traditional Religion as “Ancestor Worship”.

Africans, according to John Mbiti, believe that the departed relatives continue to live and show interest in their surviving families. Their families may show their belief by building shrines and or placing bits of food or drink on their shrines and graves and sometimes mentioning them in prayers.<sup>267</sup> This does not mean they are being worshipped but simply the remembrance of four or five generations of people who should not be forgotten.

Ancestor worship or veneration is practiced in many different cultures. These practices are not the same as the worship of gods. In these other cultures, the purpose of the ancestor veneration is to do one’s filial duty. In Korea, ancestor worship is called “jerye” and ancestor altars are called “jesa” and their ancestors are sent off with burnt

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<sup>266</sup>Opoku, *Traditional Religion*, 4.

<sup>267</sup>Mbiti, *African Religion*, 18-19.

offerings. In Northern Philippines there are many wooden images of the ancestors in museums. In Malaysia, Chinese food is offered to the ancestors during the annual Hungry Ghost festival prayers.<sup>268</sup>

In Vietnam, all Vietnamese regardless of their religious denomination have an ancestor altar in their home or business. The death anniversary of a loved one was always an important occasion. In India, this act is predominant among the Hindu. Tarpan is the ritual where the family offers tributes to the deceased and during these rituals; the family prepares the favorite food items of the deceased and offers the deceased the food. On the day a person died, family members remember them on that particular date with rituals. There is also a celebration of the ancestors called “Pitripaksh” when the family remembers all its ancestors and offers Tarpan to them.<sup>269</sup>

In Europe, traditionally the Celtic and Germanic Europe, the feast of Samhain was specially associated with the deceased. All Saints Day is also known as the Day of the Dead and that was the day that families would go to the cemeteries and light candles for their dead.<sup>270</sup> The Native American Indians also believe in Ancestor veneration; and like Africans, they do not believe that their dead ancestors are dead and gone but believe that they are still with them in spirit. Judaism has many rituals during which deceased relatives are remembered. While these practices are not called “ancestor worship,” they are a very important part of Jewish life. In daily prayers, three times a day, the Biblical

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<sup>268</sup> Leslie Spier, *The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition* (Danbury, CT Grolier, 1987)

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are referred to as a way of reminding God that the Jewish people are worthy of God's love and attention<sup>271</sup>.

Ancestor worship is the elevation of the ancestors to the level of God, the Supreme Being so I find it hard to accept that I am worshipping my parents or my brother by remembering them through Nsagu. I am a member of the Akan ethnic group; I will be discussing how the Akan view their ancestors. As an Akan, I grew up seeing my parents pour libation or Nsaguo on particular dates and days. My father, as the "Abusua Payin" or Head of the Clan/Family, had to perform Nsaguo on different occasions. I have come to the conclusion that the people who refer to this act as ancestor worship do not really understand what it stands for. If one had two parents who loved them when they were alive; that took care of and protected them, the belief is that they expect the parents to do the same even in death. The parents and the grand parents before them are living somewhere between the real world and the spiritual world and believe that because their parents and grandparents are living in a different realm, they will use whatever power they have to protect their families/children just as they did when they were alive.

On the birthdays of my parents and my brother, I pour libation in remembrance. I also pour libation on the days they died. Does this mean I am worshipping them? I believe that they will take special interest in my affairs and so I ask them to assist me in whatever capacity they can. I don't know if what I am doing is right so I need to learn more about it because it is part of my culture I believe the phrase – "someone turning in their grave" is a saying that came from the Europeans (or was it Africans)? If this saying came from the Europeans, why would they say that if the souls of their dead are buried and gone?

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<sup>271</sup> Conversations with Rabbi Jo David.

How or why would anyone's parents turn in their graves if they were to see what their family has become and the way they are behaving? Why?

This reminds me of a story that is told about a white man and an Asian who had gone to visit their families at the cemetery.

The white guy had flowers and the Asian had some food. The white guy sees the Asian putting the food on the grave and he says to the Asian: "Why are you putting food on the grave – do you really believe your dead person will eat this food?" The Asian replied: "For the same reason that you think your dead person will be able to smell the flowers you are putting on their grave."

According to Philip Bartle, in the Akan Religion, the veneration given to ancestors should be described as "homage" as opposed to worship. Ancestors are spirits that are respected. They are considered to have the power over the ordinary person and are also considered to be a constant presence in all activities that affect the family. Ancestors are not seen as "saints", they are nevertheless very much respected.<sup>272</sup>

According to Professor Opoku, Ancestor Worship was first used by anthropologist Herbert Spencer in his book titled "Principles of Sociology" published in 1885. Spencer's use of the term arose from his speculation of what went on in what he referred to as "savage" societies. This term, according to Kofi Opoku, was later borrowed by many writers in Africa and applied to practically every exercise of religious belief. The rites performed in connection with the ancestors, such as Nsaguo and the offerings of food to the ancestral spirits are religious acts but not necessarily an expression of worship.<sup>273</sup>

### **Libation**

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<sup>272</sup> Phillip Bartle, *Akan Studies: Ancestors I; Death & Beyond*, [www.scn.org](http://www.scn.org), 5.

<sup>273</sup> Opoku, *Traditional Religion*, 4-5

In his thesis on Akan Concept of Libation, Anti wrote the following as an introduction in Chapter 3:

The Akan have various terms for libation. One such term is *nsa gu*, a term made up of two Akan words *nsa* (drink) and *gu* (to pour); this implies that libation is connected with the act of pouring wine, or any other substances. Other terms are *mpaebo*, (*mpae*-prayer, *bo*- to say) and *mpaeyi*, (*mpae*- prayer, *yi*- to remove). Both these terms mean “pouring” and also refer to prayer which accompanies the pouring of the liquid in libation, that is, the act of pouring with the prayer.<sup>274</sup>

The short introductory paragraph is typical of the work of Ghanaian Christian writers on traditional Akan religion. The author selects and writes on one topic in Akan religious practices. He then puts a label from the Christian literature on it and presents an “unbiased” and objective analysis to his readers. By labelling the Akan congregational prayer, *Nsaguo*, as ‘libation’, the author pre-empts debate on whether or not the Akan practice is the same as the ancient Judaic practice. In the end, he presents his readers with Akan religion through Christian eyes. This prism of Christian glass distorts the Akan religious image.

There are several references of libation pouring in the Bible – in the Old Testament and the New Testament, but can we refer to these practices as being similar to *Nsaguo* in the Ghanaian context? The pouring of wine, water, or oil were part of the practices in the Temple in Jerusalem, part of an extremely complex set of ritual offerings to God having to do with thanksgiving, sin, healing, and other issues. They had nothing to do with ancestors, but rather, had to do with worship of God. The use of the word “libation” in English translations of the Hebrew Bible should not be confused with the

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<sup>274</sup> K.K. Anti, *Ghana Religious & Moral Education*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1989), 8.



English term "libation" used to refer, perhaps not appropriately to pouring rituals in

ATR.<sup>275</sup> In the Old Testament, the first reference to libation can be found in Genesis:

And Jacob set up a Pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a Pillar of Stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. ([Genesis](#) 35:14)

In Exodus 29:38-43, instructions are given by God for a shrine to be built and with the type of offering to be given:

38 This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. 39 Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. 40 With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. 41 Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning – a pleasing aroma an offering made to the Lord by fire. 42 For the generations to come this burnt offering are to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meetings before the Lord.

In Leviticus, it is stipulated that libation should form part of the offerings that are to be presented to Yahweh on those holy occasions. In Numbers 4:7 it looks like libation is a regular cultic practice when reference is made to "the flagons for the drink offering". In the New Testament, Paul speaks of being poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith in 2 Timothy 4:6 Paul states:

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time has come for my departure.

In John 7:37 the reference to the rivers of living waters is believed to be a reference to the libation rites of the feast of Tabernacles. The question still remains to be answered as to whether "Nsaguo" is the same as "libation".

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<sup>275</sup>Conversations with Rabbi Jo David

## **The Setting**

The Institute for Diasporan and African Culture, my sponsor, is my site with target communities which I feel will benefit from the demonstration project. There is a need for Africans in Africa and the Diaspora to become aware of: their surroundings, an appreciation for their tradition and culture and how their tradition and culture enhance their faith.

The Institute has target communities that include St Christopher's. St. Christopher's is a member of the Diocese of Washington, DC. I worship at St. Christopher's. When I first joined my church, the membership was predominantly Caucasian; however over the years we have become multiracial and multicultural with more members who have joined from different countries.

On St Christopher's day which falls on the last Sunday in July, when we parade with the flags, thirty countries are represented. It is obvious that different cultures come with these different countries. Unfortunately, we the members have not taken the time to understand or appreciate what these cultures can bring to the worship service.

There is a large African as well as Caribbean population. Among the Africans, the Nigerians are the majority and so when the Nigerians introduced their way of having "Thanksgiving celebration" it was labeled "African Thanksgiving". They were also able to advocate for a worship service that is separate from that of the rest of the congregation and this service is done entirely in the Igbo language of Nigeria. I have always wanted to start a series of articles in the 'Messenger' (the monthly magazine from St. Christopher's) to try and educate the congregation about our different cultures so that when a member of the congregation is having a celebration; we can attend and understand what is expected

of us. Within the multi faith dimension, St. Christopher's location is in a very unique position because within a twenty mile radius, it is surrounded by many different religious places of worship.

There are several religious and spiritual places of worship such as 1Buddhist temple, one Mosque, three Hindu temples, seven synagogues, two Seventh Day Adventist churches, and three AME Baptist churches. I believe that the uniqueness of St Christopher's position will enable me to start a program at St Christopher's where we can begin a dialogue with the different religious groups. I think that St. Christopher's can start a relationship with at least one of the religious groups to expand the knowledge of the members of the congregation.

I would like to see St Christopher's establish a relationship where we choose one important Christian celebration - be it Christmas, Easter or All Saints day, and invite a different religious group to worship with us and in turn, get invited to their important religious celebrations. I believe that St. Christopher's will gain more knowledge about our neighbors and our members. We will begin to see our religion in a new light. We will start the process of understanding each other and realize that the time to start the conversation is now. I had the opportunity to preach at my church and talked about the possibility of having a relationship with members of another faith. The conversation has started and the Institute will follow through to try and make it happen.

The other targeted community is the Akropong Christ Church. The Akropong Christ Church is a significant Presbyterian Church in the history of the Gold Coast (modern day Ghana). Located where the early Basel Missionaries first started their evangelical work, Christ Church became central to the spread of the gospel and the establishment of the

Church. Akropong Christ Church is central to the mission of the Institute because of its location, history and contribution to the establishment and expansion of Christianity in Ghana.

### **CHALLENGE STATEMENT:**

Nsaguo (Libation) is a ritual that seeks to maintain communication between the spirit world and the human worlds in the Akan Culture of Ghana. Some Ghanaian Christians in the Diaspora and some members of the congregation of Akropong Christ Church believe the practice of Nsaguo is antithetical to Christian belief. This teaching demonstration project will seek to educate and effectively change the attitudes of Ghanaian Christians and others about the meaning of Nsaguo.

## PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE:

There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.  
There are different kinds of working, but the same God  
works all of them in all men.<sup>1</sup> Corinthians 12: 5-6:

According to Reverend Dr. Peter Sarpong, libation is an institution of our forefathers that should not be condemned; he goes on to quote a section of the instructions that was given in 1659 to the Congregation for the Evangelizing of the Peoples to missionaries bound for China:

Under no circumstances and for no reason whatsoever should you change those people's customs and practices. It is not the culture of Italy or France or Spain that you are bringing but the faith which spurns no culture.<sup>276</sup>

It is rather unfortunate that this spirit was not carried over to Africa. For example in Nigeria, the missionaries came from a Christian background, and they were convinced that it would be best to have Nigerians converted to Christianity. They, therefore, encouraged their home government not only to send capable administrators to maintain law and order but also zealous Christian missionaries to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. In consequence of this, there was collaboration among the merchants, administrators and the missionaries to suppress the indigenous religion and to impose Christianity.<sup>277</sup>

I am an Anglican by birth, was baptized when I was a few months old and confirmed in October, 1966. I had been a practicing Anglican until my arrival in the

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<sup>276</sup> Peter K. Sarpong, *Libation* (Accra, Ghana: Anansesem Publications, Ltd., 1996), 50.

<sup>277</sup> Olupona, *African Traditional Religions*, 112.

United States. What I found was that the Episcopalian denomination is similar to the Anglican denomination and so my current denomination is Episcopalian in the US. My ethnicity has played a great role in my interpretation of the religion's scriptures. As an African who was brought up within the African/Ghanaian culture, I learned to appreciate my culture first. Christianity was imposed upon us by our parents without us giving much thought to what it meant; we did not have a choice regarding what religion we wanted to practice. When my sister and I came to the United States in 1974, the first thing we did after we were settled was to find a church; we felt the need to find an Anglican church because we did not feel whole without a religion. Our culture was also very heavily entrenched in us.

Even though the Christian religion was imposed on us as part of the colonization by the British, the fact that there are still a certain percentage of Ghanaians who still practice the African Traditional religion tells me, as a Ghanaian, that colonization did not completely rob us of our heritage. I now read the scriptures in a different way sometimes asking myself why we have had to succumb to the indoctrination of the missionaries, which to our detriment, has resulted in our feeling that our culture is inferior and that some of the rituals in our culture are of the devil. My culture and my consciousness have made me realize the fact that there is diversity in worship, and there is diversity of religions; however, ultimately, we worship the same God Almighty.

Growing up as a Ghanaian, I had the opportunity to see *Nsaguo* at different functions. I was also privileged to see it being performed by my father. Although he was a Christian, he did not see the contradictions in *Nsaguo* as those who claim to be "born again" Christians do. I remember the occasions at which my parents would offer the

libation which was on either the anniversary of the death of a loved one or on their birthdays. With the advent of “sanctification”, Born Again Ghanaian Christians who accepted Nsaguo are no longer participating in this cultural act. Currently, this act has become “evil” and they will not attend ceremonies at which these acts are performed. Some Christians consider themselves being born again because they feel they have received a spiritual and metaphysical rebirth, by accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Messiah and having received the Holy Spirit. The origin of the term “born again” is believed to have come from the New Testament – Specifically in John 3 verse 3 when Jesus said in response to Nicodemus: ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.’ These terms are frequently used by Evangelical, Fundamentalists and Pentecostal churches.

Some will perform certain acts such as Nsaguo during a child naming ceremony but choose to use soda instead of liquor. Others will give the children “soul” names but would opt not to go through the actual child naming ceremony. All of these actions which to me are “hypocritical” led me to the point of examining what Nsaguo is all about. Why do these people claim Nsaguo is of the devil? They adhere to the culture but have turned their backs on the way they lived prior to coming to the United States. Getting involved with charismatic churches has turned a lot of Ghanaians away from some of the cultural practices. My interest in this particular subject is to find out what the words of Nsaguo rituals are and to investigate why some Ghanaians Christians act adversely to this act.

Is Libation as discussed in the Bible the same as Nsaguo? To some proponents of African specifically Akan culture, ‘Libation’ has a specific meaning in Hebrew religious



practice and is regarded as a form of offering to God. The priest uses various kinds of liquids in performing this ritual. Pouring granular substances, such as, sand, powder or grain does not form part of the prayer ritual. Therefore, it is wrong to imply that ‘pouring’ automatically means ‘prayer’. It is this type of imprecise expression that has led to all sorts of confusion about the Akan congregational prayer- *Nsaguo*. *Nsaguo* is the only congregational prayer known in Akan religious observances.

Initially, the *Ohene* (*chief/king*) performed the ritual to acknowledge gratitude to, and invoke the continued blessings of, *Nyame* (*God*), on the people on *Adae* day. *Adae* is celebrated by the Akan, twice, every 42 days. Within the 42-day period, one *Adae* falls on a Sunday called (*Akwasidae*) and the other on a Wednesday (*Wukudae*). At the *Adae* festival, the ancestral stools are offered food and drink and the chief is the principal officiant representing his people. The *Adae* festival that is held on Sunday is a bigger occasion than the one that is held on Wednesday because it is usually celebrated as a public feast.<sup>278</sup>

With time, *Nsaguo* became the prayer that is used to invoke the blessing of the Supreme Being at the beginning of every undertaking. The prayer ritual is performed by two individuals; the one who performs the ritual and an assistant, on behalf of all the people present. A lonely individual, in the privacy of his home, can also perform it. The ritual has no known author or a known source of origin. Yet in every Akan community, it is the obligatory duty of the Akan *Ohene*, or in his absence, the *Ohemaa* (*Queen*), to perform this ritual prayer on the morning of *Adae* day. This means the ritual is performed every ‘forty-two days’. This duty is so important to the Akan that failure to perform it is

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<sup>278</sup>Opoku, *Traditional Religion*, 40.

enough and sufficient reason for the incumbent to lose his or her privileged and powerful position as *Ohene* or *Ohemaa*.

### **Nsaguo**

The phrase '*Nsaguo*' is used to describe the only congregational prayer in Akan religious practices. The word '*nsa*' on paper can mean hand, liquor, or alcoholic beverage and it is in the way the word is pronounced that you know what the context in which the word is being used. In the context of this phrase, the word means 'liquor or alcoholic beverage'. The verb '*gu*', from which the abstract noun '*guo*' is formed, has meanings in different contexts. '*Gu agoro*' is to bring a game or performance to an end by disruption. '*Gu dwa*' is to 'spoil it' especially in a commercial transaction.

*Gu* also means 'to bring a meeting to an end'. '*Gu anim ase*' is to act shamefully or disgracefully to let oneself and others down; publicly shame or disgrace oneself or another. *Gu* is also used as transitive verb when the meaning is more or less defined. The transfer of liquid, in small quantities at a time, is implied. '*Gu aduane so*' means 'to ladle out soup and share the meat in the soup bowl into individual soup bowls/plates.' This is a continual process and it proceeds in small portions at a time. The repetitive form of the word, '*gugu*' is a verb with the same implied meaning. '*Bosuo regugu*' means, it is drizzling. '*Gugu so nsuo*' means 'sprinkle water over it'. In these examples, the meaning implied is that the liquid drips out sparingly and in small quantities at a time or in controlled and orderly fashion.

There is also '*gu nsa*'. '*Gu*' is translated as 'pour' in Akan Christian literature. However, to 'pour' means to 'discharge copiously' or 'descend heavily'. But Akans describe heavy downpour of rain as '*nsuo reto*' not '*nsuo regugu*'. *Gu* or *gugu* is not used

to describe a heavy rain or downpour. Therefore, it is incorrect to translate ‘*gu*’, by ‘pour’. *Nsaguo*, as a physical act, can only be translated as ‘sprinkling of liquor’ on the ground or objects. Philologically, the Akan congregational prayer, ‘*Nsaguo*’, cannot be described as ‘libation pouring’. So, what is ‘*Nsaguo*’ and its significance in Akan religious/spiritual practices?

### **Nsaguo Ritual**

The *Nsaguo* ritual consists of two integral parts, both performed simultaneously by the same individual, in the same place. One part is the prayer said aloud by the person officiating. The other part consists of allowing liquid contained in a drinking glass or calabash held in the right hand of the same person, to drip continually on the ground or objects such as stools or stone. The liquids used for the ritual are liquor, palm wine or rarely, water. No liquids other than the aforementioned are used for the ritual. Only one kind of liquid is used at any particular instance.

The description that follows is for a performance in front of a large congregation. Usually, two people are involved, but only one person actually performs the ritual; the other merely assists. For the purpose of clarity and ease of description, the two people participating in the ritual will be Kofi and Yao. Yao will be the principal performer, with Kofi assisting. On Aday day, Yao would be the *Ohene*, *Ohemaa* or *Okyeame (linguist)*, and Kofi will be any of the numerous attendants of an Akan king or a palace official or even a relative.

When the ritual is about to begin, Kofi holds the bottle of liquor in his hand. He then opens it in full view of those present. Yao extends his right hand, holding a drinking glass towards Kofi to receive some of the liquor. Kofi brings the bottle, using both hands,

holds it over the proffered drinking glass, and tilts it deftly in a swift down and up motions over the glass so that only a small portion of liquor pours into the glass. Kofi repeats his act two more times. By the third time, the glass would be about a third to a half full. The drinking glass, must not be filled in one motion, or filled to overflowing. It is also important that, the act of transferring liquor from the bottle into the drinking glass is done in three separate steps.

When these preliminary and preparatory actions are completed, Yao is about to begin the ritual. Kofi's role, however, is not over yet. He still stands by Yao's side and as Yao performs the ritual, he says '*we-on*' '*we-on*' at intervals. The congregation does nothing; those present are not invited to sit if they are standing, or to stand if they are seated. Silence is not demanded of the congregation, yet everyone stops talking as soon as they become aware that the prayer has started.

### **Ohum Festival**

Okyeman is a traditional area in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Historically, it has been attested that the Akyems were one of the first Akan tribes to migrate southwards after the fall of the ancient Songhai Empire. The Akyems, according to history were a part of the then all powerful Adansi Kingdom, The Adansis were known for their ability to build illustrious structures in their kingdom; hence the name "ADANSI" (Builders). The powerful Ashanti Kingdom emerged and under the leadership of Nana Osei Tutu and, during the ascendancy of their empire fought and defeated the Adansis in about the 14th Century and absorbed the Adansi Kingdom into the growing Ashanti Kingdom. The Akyem nations which were then part of the warrior class Adansi Kingdom, broke away

and crossed the River Pra to settle on its banks to avoid being absorbed into the Ashanti Empire who they considered enemies.<sup>279</sup>

Nana Osei Tutu chose to pursue the Akyem across the River Pra to teach them a lesson and, to attempt to further build the Ashanti and expand its influence. That was a big mistake by an otherwise illustrious king of the all powerful Ashanti who were known for their mastery of the art of war and, cerebral style of fighting. While crossing the river with his army, he was killed by elite forces from the Akyems who were camping out on the other side of the river. He fell dead into the river. This was on a Thursday; this brought forth, the great oath of the Ashantis, ("Meka Yawada"- I swear by Thursday). For this, the Akyems who carried out this defeat became known as "Abuakwanfo" or "Abuakwafo" (Guerrilla Fighters).<sup>280</sup>

The Ashantis in a rare loss retreated and this tragedy made it a taboo for any Ashanti King up to the time of Nana Prempeh I (circa 1900) to cross the River Pra to the south except their armies. After the battle the Akyem moved southeastwards. As a result of this movement, some of the Akyems, especially the Kotokus, settled in the present day Ashanti-Akyem area. The majority of the Akyems, however, continued to move southeastwards and settled in several areas along the way until they came into contact with the Akwamu, who were one of the most powerful nations in the sub region with influences spanning modern day Ghana, Togo and Benin. The Akyems, especially the

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<sup>279</sup>[http:// www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

<sup>280</sup>Ibid.

elite forces known as the Abuakwas fought the Akwamus and were victorious. After the War the Akyems settled in the areas evacuated by the Akwamus.<sup>281</sup>

The Akyem Abuakwas made their temporary capitals in several areas, including Praso, until they finally settled at Pameng. However, it was during the reign of Nana Ofori Panin that the capital of Akyem Abuakwa was finally moved to "Kyebirie" (named after a black hat used by a hunter using the area as his hunting grounds). It is now known as Kyebi, where the Aduana clan had already settled. Meanwhile, the Akyem Kotoku settled at Nsutam-Bososo area with their capital at Gyadam. During the reign of the great warrior king of the Akyems, Nana Owusu Akyem Tenten, the Guan ethnic group and the Dawu ethnic group appealed to him for help to drive the Akwamus out of their area for them to enjoy peace.<sup>282</sup> The Akyems, who were mercenaries during the slave trade, were known to help other neighboring ethnic groups fight off the middle men of the slave trade and, to involve themselves in battles which were of geo-political significance.

He agreed to send his nephew, Odehyee Sefori, with an army made up mostly of the people of Akyem Akropong (the Twafo section of the Adonten Division) to go to the aid of the Dawus, the Guans and others. Odehyee Sefori succeeded in driving the Akwamus out of what is today known as Akwapim, with its capital called Akropong, named after Akyem Akropong. Sefori pursued the Akwamus across the River Volta, where they settled up to this day, with their capital at Akwamufie. On the return to [Akuapem](#) by the victorious Akyem Abuakwa army from the banks of the Volta River, Odehyee Sefori and his army, with the consent of the Okyehene, Nana Owusu Akyem

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<sup>281</sup><http://www.wikipedia.com>.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.,

Tenten, his uncle, agreed to stay in Akuapem to protect the Akuapems from any further attacks by the Akwamus. To signify this agreement, a stone was "buried" and that the Akyems were to return to Akyem Abuakwa only when that stone had "grown".<sup>283</sup>

Odehyee Safori became the Paramount Chief (Akuapemhene) with Akropong Akuapem as his capital of the newly founded Akuapem State. His nephew also became the Amanokromhene and the Gyasehene of the Akuapem state. History has it that during the reign of the famous Nana Dokua (Abirie) as both Okyehene (King) and Ohemaa (Queen mother), a quarrel arose between her and the Kotokuhene at that time. As a result, she ordered part of the Amantomiensa (soldiers of the Paramount stool), the Asiakwahene and the Begorohene, to remove the Kotokus from Gyadam. This war, known as the "Gyadam War", forced the Kotoku to leave Gyadam.<sup>284</sup>

The Kwabenghene allowed them a safe passage and not a shot was fired when they passed through Kwabeng. The Kotokuhene was given land by the then chief of Wankyi, Barimah Awire (the Oseawuohene of Akyem Abuakwa) to settle at what is now known as Oda, the capital of Akyem Kotoku state. Akyem Bosome was also part of the Akyem family from the Adansi kingdom after its fall and moved southeastwards. Land for the setting up of their capital, Akyem Swedru, was provided to them by the Akyease stool (Tarkwahene), which is part of Akyem Abuakwa. During the reign of Nana Dokua, a section of the Juabens of Ashanti revolted against the Golden Stool of Ashanti. The

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<sup>283</sup><http://www.wikipedia.com>.

<sup>284</sup>Ibid.

rebels, led by their chief, Nana Kwaku Boateng, were forced to leave Juaben in Ashanti for the south.<sup>285</sup>

They found settlement at Kyebi, Kwabeng, Tafo, Asamankese and other parts of Akyem Abuakwa. Later, when the trouble in Juaben subsided, some of them returned to Ashanti but came back again. On the third occasion, the British Colonial Government in Accra negotiated on their behalf, and with the consent of both the Kukurantumihene (the Adontenhene of Akyem Abuakwa), Nana Kwaku Abrante and Okyehene Nana Dokua, the government bought the land for the Juabens. They settled on it under the leadership and rule of their chief, Nana Kwaku Boateng, calling the area New Juaben, with Koforidua as its capital. An annual fee of one shilling (10cents) was agreed to be paid to the owners by the Government on behalf of the New Juabens. This changed in later years to one pound (\$1) per one farm land per family, which the New Juabens had to pay to the Okyehene, until the Government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah abolished it after independence in 1957.<sup>286</sup>

The Odwira festival is celebrated yearly in December or early January. The Odwira (purification) is a very important festival during which the whole state, symbolized by the stools, is purified of all its evils. The first stool to be purified is the "Great Paramount Stool" followed by the other stools, one after the other, until all the stools in the state have been purified. In Akyem Abuakwa, the Okyeman Council has decided that the celebration of Odwira Kese should be at intervals of 5 or 10 years as the

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<sup>285</sup><http://www.wikipedia.com>.

<sup>286</sup>Ibid.



Paramount stool and the Okyeman Council may decide. However, the Okuapimhene and the Amanokromhene, who took the Odwira festival to Akuapem, celebrate it annually in Akuapem with the Okyenhene or his representative attending. Every year, unless decided by the Okyenhene and the Okyeman Council to celebrate it as "*Odwira Kese*", the festival is celebrated as an ordinary (Mpaegum) with no fanfare.

The festival is celebrated twice a year in Akyem (Abuakwa Traditional area) of Ghana. These are known as OhumKan and OhumKyire and celebrated in June/July and September/ October respectively. The festival marks the anniversary of the Akyem Nation: celebrating the ancestral stools and the spirits of those who formerly occupied them. The celebration is also to mark the first harvest (yam) of the year and to ask for blessings for the coming year.<sup>287</sup>

The duration of the festival is 2 days (Tuesday – Wednesday). Two weeks before the festival, a ban is placed on drumming, dancing and noise making. Monday preceding the Tuesday, home the first harvest of the year and to have plenty of food in the house for the duration of the celebrations.<sup>288</sup> This ceremony of thanksgiving to God is the great festival of the Akyem people known as Ohum festival. The Ohum festival is celebrated in Akyem Abuakwa in two parts; the Ohumkan and the Ohumkyire

However, when it is declared as an "*Odwira Kese*", all the chiefs in Akyem Abuakwa in their respective positions and paraphernalia, including the Okuapimhene and the Amanokromhene, are invited to attend the festival and pay homage to the Paramount Stool at Kyebi. The term "*Odwira*" means purification of the state at the end of the Akan

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<sup>287</sup>[http:// www.ghanaexpeditions.com](http://www.ghanaexpeditions.com)

<sup>288</sup>Ibid.

calendar year. During the celebration, digging and farming are prohibited. The celebration takes a week with various activities taking place each day, and on the final day, the Okyenhene sits in state to receive homage from his chiefs and people, as well as from firms and organizations in and outside Akyem Abuakwa state.

The Asafosa Ritual for Peace in the Mamfe Township predates the introduction of Christianity. It is part of the Ohum festival of Akuapem in the Eastern Region. The Nsaguo ceremony is one of the ceremonies that will be videotaped and used as part of the educational video. This ritual is part of the history of the Mamfe Township. The chief of Mamfe used the Asafosa Ritual, celebrated by the community in January, as an example of an African Tradition which is not understood by Christians. The Chief explained that the ritual, which is part of the Ohum festival of Akuapem, occurs at the latter part of the festival and it is to bring the community together. The Ritual is for peace, prosperity, and continuity in the community.

The people of Mamfe realized that they needed guidance in their community and so they sought the protection of an intercessor/ancestor spirit to help them achieve this tranquility throughout the year. This yearly ritual is part of the festival which starts in the second week of January and lasts about four days, and people from the community living elsewhere come from far and wide to celebrate. The actual festival celebration starts from Thursday and culminates with the Asafosa Ritual on Sunday.<sup>289</sup> The ritual follows this pattern:

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<sup>289</sup>As told by the Mamfe Chief and his elders at Mamfe in an interview in April, 2008.

A large community pot is set in front of the chief's palace. Starting from Thursday, the heads of all the family clans of Mamfe bring pots of "palm wine", a local drink tapped from the palm tree, and pour the wine into the community pot. However, if there is a feud within the clan/family, they have to settle that dispute/feud before participating in the Asafosa Ritual. If the feud is not settled in time, they will not be able to participate in the Ritual<sup>290</sup>.

In Matthew 5: 23-24, Jesus said:

So when you are offering your gift at the altar,  
if you remember that your brother or sister has  
something against you, leave your gift there  
before the altar and go first be reconciled to  
your brother and sister, and then come and  
offer your gift.....

So what other rituals and sacraments are there in the Bible that parallel African rituals. Kofi Asare Opoku argues about libation as follows:

Through libation contact is established between the  
spiritual and the human, material or physical world.  
But who says there is only one way of doing so?

Libation expresses the African belief that the dead are  
not dead and that the dead continue to live as members  
of their families/communities and that the living can  
communicate with them.

Since death does not terminate human relationships,  
the dead, who are members of their families/communities,  
are invited through libation, to come and participate in  
the on-going activities/events in the families/communities.

The dead ancestors live close to God/Supreme Being and  
function as our intermediaries; and since they have lived  
here on earth before, they understand our problems and  
can relay them to God/Supreme Being, and

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<sup>290</sup> As told by the Mamfe Chief and his elders at Mamfe in an interview in April, 2008.

that is why we call on them during libations. The prayers in libations are meant to pass through them to God/Supreme Being.

When some people start pouring libation they say and I quote: "Osor nsa! (the Sky have a drink) Asase nsa! (Mother Earth have a drink)". By saying so, we are calling on the heavens and the earth or earth and sky, the two great fructifying forces in the universe which come together to sustain human life on earth. What is wrong in acknowledging our dependence on these great forces that sustain our life on planet earth?

Libation is also an act of remembrance and sharing. Through it the living share food and drink with the dead. Why should we forget our dead simply because we have been converted to Christianity?

As stated before, Nsaguo is performed at all functions in the Akan society. I will closely examine the differences between libation in the Bible and Nsaguo and seek to understand if the proponents of the culture are right when they say that the two are not the same. It is also performed at different functions such as child naming, marriages, funerals and any occasion where there will be a large gathering. In my demonstration project, I will choose the Nsaguo Ritual, which is a form of Akan congregational prayer at several social events and the subsequent activities to demonstrate how this ritual is performed.

I will write down the words of the prayers carefully because they are always not the same for the different occasions. There are priests who do not have any problem with Nsaguo and I will try to interview such priests in order to get their understanding of why they do not have a problem with it. My hope is that with my examination of this subject, I can and will educate myself, my fellow Ghanaians, my brothers and sisters of

the African American heritage as well as people of other cultures who are interested in the ritual of Nsaguo.

## PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

The three goals of the project are:

### **Goal 1**

**To go with a select group of about 3-5 people to Ghana and witness the Nsaguo ceremonies that will take place as part of the larger festival of Ohum, Akuapem and to look at these rituals in the larger context of Ghanaian culture**

**Objective 1:** Recruit a team of 3 - 5 people from the Diaspora to experience the ritual of Nsaguo in Ghana

Strategy: I will use selection criteria to recruit the team from both the Diaspora and Ghana; based on age, maturity, intellectual ability to reason logically, interest in Africa and African culture; the understanding of religious rituals and interest in the intersection of religion and culture.

Evaluation of Objective 1– This objective will be accomplished when based on the above stated criteria I have identified and recruited 4 persons to be a part of the team.

**Objective 2:** Planning the trip.

Strategy A: The trip will have to be taken within the period of December, 2009 and January 2010, because that is when the Ohum festival is celebrated. After the team has been identified, I will contact the travel agent to make the necessary arrangements to get the following:

1. Flight dates between mid December and mid January
2. Ghanaian visas for team members

Strategy B: I will schedule two telephone conferences with team members to answer questions they may have about Ghana.

Evaluation of Objective 2 – This objective will be accomplished when based on the above strategy, the team is able to get their flight dates and visas and two telephone conferences are held with team members.

**Objective 3:** Carry out the trip.

Strategy A: Prepare a trip schedule, outlining all events for team members.

Strategy B: After all dates have been confirmed, I will go ahead of the team to make sure that all arrangements in Ghana in terms of lodging etc are in place and to meet the team at the airport upon arrival.

Strategy C: The following day after the arrival, the team from the Diaspora and Ghana, will come together as a group. Participants will be commissioned by TIDAC's Executive Director Rev. Daniel Nyante. At the commissioning, team members will be provided orientation and given a journal to record their thoughts on what they witness at the different rituals.

Evaluation for Objective 3:

Strategy A: The objective for this strategy will be met when the travel schedule is finalized and distributed to team members.

Strategy B: This objective will be met when the team finally arrives in Ghana and are met and taken to their place of lodging at Akropong.

Strategy C: This will be accomplished when of the team witness and utilize the journal in recording their impressions and thoughts about the libations as they witness them.

## **Goal 2**

**To produce and disseminate an educational video and photographs on Nsaguo ritual, for different occasions, to educate both Ghanaian Christians and others in the Diaspora.**

**Objective 1: Get a contract with a videographer in place.**

Strategy: Hire a professional to videotape several Nsaguo rituals at various occasions at the Mamfe Ohum festival. I will discuss ahead of time, with the assistance of my site team members, Rabbi Jo David and Rev. Daniel Nyante, portions of the ritual that must be video and audio taped.

Evaluation for Objective 1 - This objective will be accomplished when I am able to hire a professional to videotape the ceremonies and go over the scope of work.

**Objective 2: Videotape rituals and personal interviews in Ghana and the United States.**

Strategy A: Using the Scope of Work, my team and I will select and monitor the rituals and the personal interviews to be taped in Ghana. I will be interviewing the linguists involved in the ritual, queen mothers, priests of different Christian faith religions as to their understanding of Nsa Gu.

Strategy B: Select which shots of the different rituals will be taken.

Strategy C: Schedule an appointment with the Episcopalian rector in Atlanta who uses Nsaguo in her liturgy.

Strategy D: Videotape the liturgy.

Evaluation of Objective 2 – This objective will be accomplished when I am able to videotape all the rituals in Ghana and the United States – ready for editing.

**Objective 3: Edit the videotape.**

Strategy A: Per the terms of the contract, I should receive the videotape by the end of the trip for editing utilizing the knowledge of my site team members and others who are familiar with the ritual.

Strategy B: Translate videotapes into English.



Evaluation for Strategy A - This Strategy will be accomplished when I receive the video tapes of the different rituals that the team witnesses and make the edits with my site team members Rabbi Jo David and Rev. Daniel Nyante. I will incorporate the tapes from Ghana and the United States into one document.

Evaluation for Strategy B: This strategy will be accomplished when I complete the translation of the Nsaguo prayers from Akan into English and getting the translation validated by Professor Kofi Asare Opoku and Professor Mercy Oduyoye.

#### **Objective 4: Dissemination**

Strategy A: The educational videotape will be available for sale at the website of The Institute for Diasporan and African Culture. TIDAC will put up workshops for anyone interested in attending and learning about Nsaguo. TIDAC will be available, by invitation, to conduct workshops about this ceremony.

Strategy B: I will hire a professional to caption the videotape in English.

Evaluation for Strategy 3 - This Strategy will be accomplished when I receive the video tapes of the different NsaGu rituals that the team witnesses and I am able to edit the tapes into an educational tape with captions.

### **Goal 3**

**To produce a first draft of a handbook on Nsaguo and disseminate the handbook to effectively change Ghanaian attitudes regarding that Ghanaian ritual. The journals handed at the commissioning will be used as part of the handbook to record the thoughts and reactions of the team members. The handbook will also be used as a step by step guide by non-Ghanaians who are interested in the practice of Nsaguo.**

**Objective 1:** To plan and develop an educational program at St. Christopher's introducing the research work on Nsaguo.

Strategy: I will send out invitations to Ghanaian Churches in the Washington DC Metropolitan area. Develop requirements to be used to recruit a working group.

Evaluation: This objective will be accomplished when I am able to set a date for the workshop, select a working group for the program.

**Objective 2:** Plan the program

Strategy: I will select the videos to be used for that program which should include the introductory tape of the video on Nsaguo which talks about the words to the ritual.

Evaluation: This objective will be achieved when we are able to plan the program to be viewed by participants a) who are not practicing the ritual probably because they do not understand what the prayer is about b) participants who accept the ritual and practice it, but do not fully understand what the prayers are about; and c) non Ghanaians in the Diaspora who are interested in the practice of the ritual.

**Objective 3:** Run the adult education program.

Strategy: Run the program at St Christopher's. I have to make sure that the attendees are aware before hand of the discussions about the program after the videos have been shown. Have a question and answer session after the video.

Evaluation: I will have evaluation forms for the attendees to fill out an evaluation form and to have a discussion at the end of the session.

**Objective 4:** Plan another session with a non-Ghanaian group who are interested in practicing the ritual of Nsaguo to go through the ritual using the handbook as a guide.

Strategy: I will send out invitations to a group that has expressed an interest in knowing how to pour Nsaguo. The handbook will be used as a guide in the practice of the ritual. This workshop will be used to make changes to the handbook if needed prior to the final publication.

Evaluation: This objective will be accomplished when I am able to get the group of non-Ghanaians in the Diaspora, interested in Nsaguo to used the handbook as a guide and are able to go through the ritual with minimum mistakes and adjustments are made to the draft of the handbook based on any missteps in the practice session.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

My research will be in the form of personal interviews, observations as well as utilizing the print media. I will specifically interview two (2) linguists, two queen mothers, - both Christians - one an Episcopalian (Anglican) and the other a Methodist. I will also interview a male chief who is Presbyterian; three priests, one Methodist, a Catholic Archbishop (if he is available) and an Anglican Priest.

These interviews will be used to get a clear understanding of their views on Nsaguo and whether they see any contradictions between Nsaguo and their Christian faith. I will also use books written by African theologians as well as theologians whose works have a direct impact on my project. To be current, I intend to use the research facilities of several institutions. I will also include works from biblical studies as well as social theory. The research questions will be as follows:

1. **Historical:** Investigate African Religious Traditions with the focus on Ghana, West Africa. What role do the ancestors play in the culture? Focus on Scriptural/Biblical traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Who are examples of early Ghanaian missionaries? Information on David Asante, Capitaine and Carl Reindorf and Theophilus Opoku. History about the Sokoto Kingdom in the 1700's. What aspects of my setting require a historical analysis for an adequate understanding? What turning points have occurred? What historical periods can one discern? What difficulties does this historical analysis present? For the sake of the project, what historical aspects need to be recovered, emphasized, or reframed i.e. understood in new emancipatory ways? What resources from the past shed light upon the problem, or help you think about the rejection of the Nsaguo ritual by Ghanaian Christians in a different way?
2. **Theological:** What are the World Religious Traditions of Ancestors - Chinese vs. the West? Are the Western Patriarchs honored? Focus on commonality in the Biblical Theological constructive work. In the African Traditional Religion – look at proverbs and the words used. What are the traditional cultural practices? Were there any libation pouring or ritual practices in the Bible? Compare the libation pouring in the Bible with Nsaguo in the African/Akan Traditional Religion/Culture. Africans performed their religion in rituals vs. the written texts such Judaism – with both the oral and written Torah. What does Islam say about ancestors? How do they deal with it? What limited, ignored, or misunderstood

doctrines of African Traditional Religion act as obstacles to the realization of the hopes in this project? How do these doctrines function, both in explicit teaching and in hidden ways? What new recovery, renewed emphasis, clarification, or reconstruction of doctrines need to take place to enable the project to be successful? What new theological insights have you discovered that would guide or illuminate this project? (constructive theology) What theological schools or theological voices have been helpful in the research?

3. **Social/Cultural:** Discuss other instances of Nsaguo. What is the change you want to effect? What moral issues are at stake? What norms from the Christian life and teaching apply here? How does the location of the people influence their acceptance/rejection of this principal? What social, political, economic, and psychological factors contribute to this challenge/problem? Specifically indicate the nature and structure of racism, classism, sexism, impacts the problem? What are the structures that contribute to this challenge/problem? How is Power exercised?
4. **Educational:** How do people learn? Who and how many people suffer from the problem? Where are these people located? In what ways are these people affected? What systems, institutions, agencies, and /or organizations are involved and specific policies or practices of these structures need changing? Who are the key decision makers? What trends are apparent? What will happen if nothing changes?

### **EVALUATION PROCESS:**

My team consists of the participants and my site team. They will assess the project and evaluate it. Assessment tools will be utilized and quantitative and qualitative analyses will be used. The goals will have been achieved when 90% of the team from the Diaspora and Ghana can perform Nsaguo utilizing the handbook and understanding the ritual they perform.

The completed questionnaires, personal interviews and the journals utilized by participants will serve as a basis for the evaluation. The Site team will be asked to do the evaluation, and the criterion for the evaluation will be:

1. To have a third of the participants/audience gain an understanding of what Nsaguo entails.
2. Can a Christian and perform the ritual of Nsaguo without the fear of having committed a “sacrilege”?

## **TIMELINE**

October 15 - November 25, 2009	Preparation and submission of proposal to seminar Professor
November 25 – December 1, 2009	Initial discussions re practical details of filming and production of film.
December 1, 2009	Submission of proposal to the Director of the D.Min.
December 1 – December 15, 2009	Development of script for shooting, production details, coordination in Ghana.
December 19, 2009	Departure to Ghana
December 28, 2009	Departure of the Team to Ghana
December 29, 2009	Commissioning of Team and meeting with the videographer.
December 30 - January 6, 2010	Videotape different Nsaguo ceremonies and personal interviews in Ghana
January 15- 20, 2009	Videotape Nsaguo liturgy in the United States.
January 22 - February 28, 2010	Editing and translation of the Ghana and United States video tapes. Select photographs to be included in the handbook and to be put on the website.
March, 2010	Complete educational video
April, 2010	Produce the first draft of the handbook

May, 2010	Plan the workshop at St. Christopher's.
June, 2010	Make necessary revisions to the handbook.
July, 2010	Start the write up of the project



## **BUDGET**

### **COST OF TRAVELING TO GHANA**

AIRFARE	\$5,400.00
ACCOMMODATIONS	\$4,000.00
VIDEOGRAPHER	\$1,000.00
EDITING	\$1,000.00
TRANSLATION	\$1,000.00
HANDBOOK PUBLICATION	\$2,000.00
OTHER	\$1,000.00
TOTAL	<hr/> \$15,400.00 <hr/>

## **MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES:**

On March 15<sup>th</sup> my site team met to discuss the assessment process and make a decision on the competencies they felt I would need to complete my demonstration project. I had given the site team members the information on their responsibilities as well as what needed to be done for the competencies. I went over the requirements for the competency assessment and gave each member of the site team an opportunity to go over the requirements and the competencies. After that the group discussed the requirements as well as the competencies and then each member was asked to take time and make their decision based on their knowledge of me as they have come to know me in the capacity of the work I do at St Christopher's.

Each site team member selected competencies they felt I needed to focus on. There was a discussion as to why those picks were made and finally, a consensus was reached as to which three competencies the site team would go with as the three competencies I needed to work on and they are as follows:

### **Multifaith leader**

A leader is one who creates an environment in which a variety of gifts may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts, and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the sensitivity to share resources.

The site team felt that this was an area I needed to continue and develop because it is very necessary in the ministry I am undertaking. The multifaith leader makes sure s/he has an understanding of other religious faiths.

## **Organizer**

A community organizer is more than someone who can create the grounds for social change. A community organizer is one who learns the community, and helps the community come to know itself. Organizing is a task that everyone in ministry must engage in some way. Multifaith community organizing entails a special ability to organize not within but across religious boundaries in ways that cross them responsibly while empowering people to work together for change that will bring a greater measure of common good.

The site team members felt that my organizing skills would become even more important as I grow in the ministry and so it was important that I continue to develop this skill to maximize my effectiveness. It was important for me to develop this skill because the challenges presented by working or interacting with members of other religious faiths and dealing with the cultural issues that become part of the equation.

## **Facilitating Transformation**

My site team was very excited when I invited them to share in this journey with me. The excitement came from the fact that they saw this as an opportunity for them to learn. I had become an agent of transformation to them giving them a chance to see and learn new things; and this was an opportunity for them to change.

To develop this competency, I have to make sure I have sufficient knowledge of what I am working with and to do this, I will educate myself in the components of NsaGu (libation). I believe that the research that I will undertake and the interviews I will be conducting will give me enough information to get me ready to answer questions on and about the project.

As an agent of transformation, I will educate myself in the components of NsaGu through research and the personal interviews I will conduct with the linguist, chiefs to get their understanding of Nsaguo and what it plays in their lives. I will also interview priests like Rev. John Ekem, who has written a book: Priesthood in Context: A Study of Priesthood in Some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and Its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation; to get his thoughts on Nsaguo. I will try to get at least three priests to interview, to expand my education.

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### **Site Team Members**

**Reverend Daniel Kwaku Nyante** was born in Ghana, West Africa, migrating to the United States, in August, 1978. He attended New York City Technical College and Pratt Institute School of Architecture in Brooklyn. In February 1991, he established a Design, Construction and Mechanical Contracting Company in Brooklyn, New York. Through God's Grace, the Company has designed, constructed and completed installation work in Residential, Institutional and Commercial in both public and privately owned properties, in the New York Metropolitan Area. He obtained his Master of Divinity Degree from New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) in May, 2007 and was ordained in August 2008. He is currently the Executive Director of the Institute for Diasporan and African Culture (TIDAC), established and inaugurated in March 2009, to foster a close relationship and understanding of African Tradition, Culture and Christianity. He is currently a doctoral candidate at New York Theological Seminary. As Executive Director of TIDAC, Rev. Nyante shares in the vision and the mission of telling the African story through African eyes.

**Pauline Azore** is a highly motivated, self-directed Registered Nurse with over thirteen years of managerial experience and twenty-seven years of Neonatal Intensive Care nursing in an 800-hundred bed urban hospital. She exhibits proficiency in clinical education and staff development, communication and clinical expertise in Neonatal Nursing; providing education in health care maintenance and disease prevention is a passion of hers. Pauline holds a BS degree in Health Care Administration and a MA in Community Health Promotion and Counseling, and has two years experience as an Adjunct Professor at the University of the District of Columbia. She has worked extensively tutoring high school and college students. It is the combination of these skills

and knowledge that Pauline brings as part of the site team. Pauline is a member of St Christopher's Lay Committee.

**Paul M. Browne** was born in Guyana, South America; he switched from the English style Congregational church to Episcopal Church. A very active volunteer, Paul was involved in multicultural activities from about the age of ten in the Boy Scouts and Boys Brigade. What he brings to the table is an international flavor based on being involved in three or more different denominations and the military for twenty eight years. He brings these lifetime experiences, a valuable attribute to the team to help Ms. Shaw-Taylor graduate from this program with flying colors. Paul is currently the Junior Warden on the Vestry at St. Christopher's.

**Juanita Moore** - was born and raised in Florida. Having gone through the Jim Crow years of racial discrimination and personal tragedies - her parents were killed by white supremacists because her father was actively registering African Americans to vote. Ms. Juanita has been sustained through these trials and has fought to get justice for her family. As a member of St Christopher's, Ms. Juanita is a matriarch who brings a wealth of experience, spirituality and resilience to the site team.

**Kathy Berney** is one of the church members with the organizational knowledge of St Christopher's. Kathy has seen both turbulent times and good times at St. Christopher's and is a welcome addition to the Lay Committee. A practicing shaman, Kathy's spirituality has always brought a whole new dimension to our discussions. This is absolutely one of the many assets she brings to my site team.

**Enid Knight** was born in Jamaica and migrated to the United States. She graduated from the North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University,

Greensboro, North Carolina with a B.Sc. in Food & Nutrition in 1969 and in 1971 with an M.Sc. from the same University. She received her doctorate degree from Cornell University, Ithaca, New York in Nutritional Science in 1977. Enid has a huge experience in research work and has received numerous honors from several institutions. She has published more than 40 articles and more than 50 abstracts in peer reviewed journal. One of her notable funded research work in 2002 was on: Co-PI of South African Project. “The Impact of TB, HIV, STD, Hepatitis C and Substance Abuse in Correctional Service Institution on Women and Children (3 year project). As a member of the Lay Committee of St Christopher’s Episcopal Church, Ms. Enid has always brought her insightful analysis and research background to effectively guide the seminarians with their research papers. As a retired Professor of Nutritional Science at Howard University, Enid brings her wealth of knowledge in research and spirituality to make this journey easier.

**Rabbi Jo David** was ordained as a Rabbi in 1992 from the Academy for Jewish Religion, in NY; and holds a Masters Degree in Judaic Studies from New York University, and a B.S. degree in Film Studies of Jewish Life from Empire State College (SUNY). Prior to her rabbinic career, Rabbi David was an award-winning advertising and public relations executive, with her own firm based in San Francisco and New York. Rabbi Jo David has ministered to Jews and non-Jews around the world as a congregational rabbi, as a pastoral counselor with a specialization in bereavement and group dynamics, as founder and Executive Director of a not-for-profit organization dealing with international community development, and as a “rabbi at sea” for Holland America and other cruise ship lines. A published author, Rabbi David has written about many different subjects including genealogy, healing, liturgy, the Jewish life cycle,

manners, archaeology, food and wine. Her most recent article is included in the new “Women and Judaism” volume of the “Women and Religion” series published by Praeger Press. She is presently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry in Multi-Faith Affairs program at New York Theological Seminary. Her experiences with film and insights will be a huge asset to the site team.

## **GOAL ONE THE WITNESSES**

**Criteria to qualify as a team member are as follows:**

Age - in order to have a broad spectrum of view, the minimum age was set at eighteen with no maximum age. The age of eighteen was because it was necessary to have team members who are old and mature enough to be independent thinkers, and to be able to utilize the travel journal which would be provided to all team members.

Maturity - It was important for the team members to be mature. Maturity is the period of time in your life after your physical growth has stopped and you are fully developed state of being mature; full development. Maturity in this case refers to maturity in mind and reasoning.

Intellectual ability to reason logically - This comes with the mature sense of reasoning, and having the ability to make decisions through the art of deduction. Some characteristics of a person with intellectual ability is as follows: an avid reader, provides very alert, rapid answers to questions, has a wide range of interests, is secure emotionally, is venturesome, wanting to do new things, needs little outside control - applies self discipline, is resourceful - solving problems by ingenious methods, is creative in new ideas, seeing associations, has the capacity to look into things and be puzzled, is involved with many exploratory type activities, reveals originality in oral and written expression, is perceptually open to his or her environment, displays a willingness to accept complexity, and is independent.

Interest in Africa and African Culture

It was important to have team members who are interested in knowing more about Africa and the culture of Africa, so that there will be a genuine feeling of achievement when witnessing a cultural event.

The understanding of religious rituals and interest in the intersection of religion and culture.

Being in the Multifaith track, it was important to have team members with an open mind, an appreciation of religious rituals of other religions and with an interest in how the different religions overlap.

In order of importance, the understanding of religious rituals and an interest in the intersection of religion and culture was of utmost importance followed by an interest in Africa and African culture. After all, this demonstration project is about an African ritual and having a team with these attributes is important. This strategy was accomplished because selected team members all had an interest in the purpose of the trip. Conclusion: – At the end of this specific strategy we felt that based on the participation and the effort of each and every team member exhibited, this strategy was accomplished.

It was necessary to recruit a team to serve as witnesses to the program. The recruitment of the team A was from a group of Christians, both African American and Ghanaian who were willing to take the trip to Ghana to witness the ritual. It was also necessary to develop requirements to be used to recruit the team members; because consistency of thought and mindset was needed for this demonstration project. Thus out of the requirements grew criteria which were used to recruit the team. These criteria were used to select the team members. It was important for the team members to have a clear understanding of the objectives. It was necessary for the team to be recruited to have the following:

- 5) Interest in a religious mission for the benefit of the community
- 6) Objectivity to be able to appreciate the merits of the mission
- 7) Ability to keep issues on an impersonal level.
- 8) The ability to critically analyze different points of view

The criteria developed for the requirements to recruit the team members, also had these in-built fulfillment of the objectives listed above; so this strategy was accomplished. I was able to recruit Rabbi Jo David, Rev. Christine Foster, Rev. Dr. Wanda Lundy and Rev. Dr. Daniel Nyante from the United States to be a part of my team.

The strategy was accomplished because flight arrangements were made through ITS International Travel Agency and the flight dates were set for December 26, 2009 as the departure date from New York Kennedy Airport, via Delta Airlines; with an arrival date of December 27, 2009 at Kotoka International Airport in Ghana. Members of the team got their passports and their visas - some were arranged through the Travel agency. All team members received their visas and travel documents prior to the departure date.

Two telephone conferences were scheduled with team members to discuss issues they may have. One was held in November 16, 2009 and the second was held on December 7, 2009 to finalize details of the trip, and to make sure all concerns and questions had been answered. Flight dates were set and visas obtained. I arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December ahead of the group which was due to arrive on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December. I met the group at the airport with Rev. Nyante and we all went to Akropong from the airport. Team members were met at the Airport and were driven to Akropong where they were shown their lodging, settled in for the day to start orientation the next morning.



The commissioning occurred on the 28<sup>th</sup> instead of the 27<sup>th</sup> because that was when the other team members from Ghana could participate in the project. Members were commissioned by Rev. Nyante and were given an orientation by Pro. Kofi Asare Opoku. I explained the reason for the trip and the participants were given a copy of the travel journal. (See Appendix 8) A trip schedule was prepared.

On Monday morning, other team members from Ghana joined together with the US team to form the group. The group was commissioned by Rev. Daniel Nyante utilizing the travel journal. There were a few questions asked by the team members about the quest and the expectations of the candidate. See Appendix 3 - the travel journal and Appendix 4 the question and answer session at the commissioning.



*(TIDAC)*  
*The Institute for Diasporan and African*  
*Culture*  
**2009-2010 WINTERIM PROGRAM SCHEDULE**



***AKWAABA (Welcome)***

*Group leaves New York on Saturday, December 26, 2009 and arrives in Ghana on Sunday, December 27, 2009*

**DECEMBER 26, 2009 - JANUARY 10, 2010**

**Day 1, Sunday, December 27, 2009:**

Arrival at the Kotoka International Airport, then onward transfer to Akropong (Approximately 45 min. in mountains)

9:00am – 11-am	Unpacking and settling in
12 noon – 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:30 pm – 2:30 pm	Orientation welcome to Ghana
	Commissioning by Rev. Nyante
	Distribution of Travel Journals by Eva Shaw-Taylor
	Discussion of the demonstration project
3:00pm – 5:00pm	Meeting with Krontihene & Okyeame

**Day 2, Monday December 28, 2009**

	7:00 -8:00am	Breakfast
Lecture 1	8:30 – 10:00 a.m.	Orientation – Welcome to Ghana – Prof. Opoku
Lecture 2	10:30 – 12:00 noon	Overview of Ghanaian History – Prof. Addo-
Fening		
Lunch	12:30 – 1:30 pm	
Lecture 3	2:00 – 3:30 pm	Africa Traditional Religion & Christianity –
		Rev. Dr. Asamoah Gyedu

Lecture 4            4:00 – 5:30 pm   African Shrines and their parallels to Christianity – Rev. Dr. Ekem

6:00 – 7:00 pm            Dinner

Evening Program            7:30 - 9:00 pm            Reception

**Day 3, Tuesday, December 29, 2009**

Departure for Kumasi – leave at 4:00am - Breakfast on the road.

Arrival at Kumasi - through Bonwire?

Appointment with Archbishop Sarpong

Spend the night in Kumasi

**Day 4, Wednesday, December 30, 2009**

Leave Kumasi through Bonwire on the way back to Akropong

Have dinner at Akropong

**Day 5, Thursday, December 31, 2009**

7:00 - 8:00am            Breakfast

Lecture 1            8:30 – 10:00 a.m.            The African Traditional World View – Prof. Opoku

Lecture 2            10:30 – 12:00 noon            A feminist Perspective on African Culture & Christianity – Prof. Mercy Oduyoye

12:15 – 1:30 pm            Lunch

Lecture 3            2:00 – 4:30 pm

5:30 – 6:30 pm            Dinner

Evening Program -            7:00 – 9:00 pm            African Proverbs and their significance – Prof. Opoku

10:00 pm – Watch night service

**Day 6, Friday, January 1, 2010**

Breakfast            7:00 -8:00 am

8:30 – 9:00            Leave for church service at Christ Presbyterian Church

Lunch	12:30 – 4:30pm	New Year's thanksgiving luncheon
	5:30 - 6:30 pm	Shabbat Service

Refreshments after the service

**Day 7, Saturday, January 2, 2010**

	7:00 -8:00 am	Breakfast
	9:00 am	Funeral in the morning
Lunch	12:30pm – 1:30 pm	Orientation – Brief history about Asafosa Ritual
	2:00 – 4:00 pm	Scripture study
	5:00 – 6:00pm	Dinner
		Free evening

**Day 8, Sunday, January 3, 2010**

	7:00 -8:00 am	Breakfast
	8:30 – 12 noon -	Church Service at Christ Presbyterian Church
-	12:30 – 1:30 pm	Lunch
Afternoon -	Mamfe – Asafosa Peace Ritual	
-	6:00 – 7:00 pm	Dinner
		Free Evening

**Day 9, Monday, January 4, 2010**

7:00 -8:00am	-	Breakfast
8:30 am – 10:00 am	-	Visit to Tetteh Quarshie Cocoa Farm, Mampong, Akuapem;
		Aburi Botanical Gardens & Aburi Carver's shops;
		At the Gardens - Story Time in Africa – Prof. Opoku
	-	Lunch

Birthday Party for Queen Mother of Mamfe

**Day 10, Tuesday, January 5, 2010**

Departure for Cape Coast – leave at 4 am Breakfast on the road

Visit to the Castle at Cape Coast and Elmina

Free evening – Music in Accra

**Day11, Wednesday, January 6, 2010**

7:00 – 8:00 am	Breakfast	
8:30 am – 3:00pm	Bead factory	
Lecture 4	4:00 – 5:30 pm	The 2011 Walk – Dr. Wanda Lundy
6:00- 7:00 pm	Dinner	

**Day12, Thursday, January 7, 2010**

7:00 – 8:00 am	Breakfast
8:30 – 12:30	Panel discussion – Prof. Mercy, Dr Rabiatsu Armah, Dr. Elizabeth Amoah, Akua Asiedua, Dr. Wanda Lundy, Chris Foster, Rabbi Jo David
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Lunch
2:30 pm – 5:00 pm	God in African Belief – Prof. Opoku
6:00- 7:00 pm	Dinner

**Day 13, Friday, January 8, 2010**

7:00 – 8:00 am	Breakfast
8:30 – 12: noon	Meeting with Krontihene and Linguist
12:30 – 1:30	lunch
2:00 – 4:30 pm	Meeting with Mamfehene and Linguist

Shopping in Accra & Packing

**Day 14, Saturday, January 9, 2010**

7:00 – 8:00 am	Breakfast
10:00 -	Departure for Durbar

Departure to Accra for some participants.

**Day 15, Sunday, January 10, 2010**

Check-in and Departure for New York

Interviews for the Nsa Guo video and paper

1. Krontihene and Linguist
2. Mamfehene and subchiefs
3. Linguists
4. Archbishop Peter Sarpong

# SERVICE OF COMMISSIONING



**NYANSAPO**

**WISDOM KNOT**

**OFFICIATING MINISTER: Rev. Daniel Nyante**



**Nyame Ye Ohene**

God is King  
Reconciliation



**Mpatapo**

Peacemaking,

**“THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING**

**OF WISDOM;**

**AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY ONE IS UNDERSTANDING**

**PROVERBS 9:10**



**Bi Nka Bi**

Peace, Harmony



**Gye Nyame**

No one is Greater than God

SPONSORED BY

**THE INSTITUTE FOR DIASPORAN & AFRICAN STUDIES (TIDAC)**

**IN COLLABORATION**

**WITH**

**THE NEW YORK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (NYTS)**

THE INSTITUTE FOR DIASPORAN & AFRICAN STUDIES (TIDAC)

PARTICIPANT'S PLEDGE:

I, acknowledge that God created all peoples of the earth and blessed them with cultural distinctions by which all their lives will be enriched.

As I encounter people of different cultures, Lord help me to develop a beautiful mosaic of different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, and different dreams in my heart and in my mind because

*"God hath made of one, all mankind, to dwell upon  
the whole face of the earth, determining appointed times,  
and the limits of their habitation." Acts 17:26*

SO I ASK FROM

GOD

KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM. ACCEPTANCE

AND RESPECT FOR

OTHER FAITH RELIGIONS.

I PLEDGE:

- I) TO OBSERVE with interest the natural endowments of various cultures.
- II) TO THINK impartially about what I see, especially, to think constructively about all phenomena that may seem different from my store of knowledge and experience.
- III) TO ANALYZE objectively what I see, hear and experience in the light that God has shone in the world. May God's Holy Spirit grant me the discernment into the essence and richness in a culture that may be different from mine.

I hereby pledge to do my best to seek God's revelation in the activities and festivities of the men, women and children that I meet.

*"My help comes from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth." Psalm 121:2*

***SO HELP ME GOD!!!***



## Service of Commissioning

Prof. Opoku:

Through the Service of Commissioning, let me on behalf of TIDAC welcome you. Welcome to the headquarters of TIDAC. I wish you a happy and wonderful holiday season and a great 2010 in which I wish to wish you on behalf of our ancestors on whose soil you are; to wish you the best that the universe offers bringing you good health, happiness, true happiness, true meaningful happiness and unlimited prosperity in the right sense of the word and a year in which what is closest to your heart will be realized so that each and every one of you will fulfill the purpose of their creation because I believe that each human being, and this I would say is in line with the thinking of our ancestors, human beings is brought in this world with a mission from God.

Because no one decided to come here on their own. Somebody brought us here and the imagination of our forebears helped them to try to find a reason for their presence in the world. And of course each culture does the same thing providing a reason for their existence a reason for their being and these reasons I would suggest have one source namely – the creator put this mind in us that enabled us to come up with meaningful reasons for our being here.

And so we are here for a purpose and I do hope that in coming here will bring us closer and closer to the realization of this purpose; so that we can all live meaningful lives for the service of the one who sent us here by whatever name we choose to call that one whether that one is a person or whether that one is a spirit, it's all the same person, the same being that sent us here. And so I will, after this few words of welcome, turn the program over to Rev Nyante to perform the service of commissioning so that we can rightly begin our session.

Rev. Nyante:

Thank you. I'd like to welcome each and everyone on the occasion of the Institute's program of the awareness that we are trying to bring on ourselves. This period, the concern is the demonstration project of one of our members Ms. Eva Shaw-Taylor and we are commissioning to make sure that we all help in making the program a success so at this time we are going to start with the guidelines as to how the commissioning will start. Before we start, I'd like to ask Dr. Wanda Lundy to give us a prayer.

Rev. Lundy:

Prays: Gracious and Eternal God, we give thanks for this day – this is the day that the Lord has made, we rejoice and are

glad; we thank you for waking us up this morning, we thank you for our health and our strength, we thank you for the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the food that we eat,; we thank you for the gift of family and friends, we give thanks this day. As the scripture says if we had a thousand tongues, we won't be able to thank you enough for the many blessings you provide for us.

That you look out for us when we are not looking out for our selves, that you protect us; that you give us strength, that you have given us a purpose and a reason for our being; that you have brought us together from the North, the South, the East and the West to this place and we ask you Holy God that as we come each in our own way, from our different communities that we represent, the different perspectives that we carry, we ask Holy God that as we begin this journey that you would lead and guide, and direct our paths and that you would order our steps, we invite and ask the ancestors to be with us to guide and direct us ; we ask that you give us courage to not be afraid and but to step out on faith believing that you are with us every step of the way we are also here to help make our time a more pleasant time.

Those who feed us, those who are teaching us, those who are carrying us to and fro, those who are recording; everyone who has a role in this experience and this journey Lord, we ask for their protection and we ask that you give them good health and anyone who may not be feeling well right now, we ask dear Lord that you give us good health during this period of time, and that you will watch over us as we go around in the highways and byways and around the street curves, down the deep valleys and the high mountains wherever we are dear God, we ask that you protect us and we thank you Lord for it already because we believe that it is done and it is so.

Dear God we are going to experience you in ways that we have never experienced you before on this journey; we are going to learn more about who you are and as a result we will learn more about who we are. We ask dear God that you would please help us to walk in the goodness and the fullness of truth and knowledge; help us to be able to shake loose those old perceptions and those old ideas and those old thoughts that have kept us in bondage, free us, free us through the truth Holy God.

We thank you that we have on this journey representatives from the African Traditional Religions and representatives from Christianity, and from Islam and from Judaism, help us to see that

we are one and that there is one God and that we only speak a different language; that you love us all equally the same. We thank you, thank you; thank you for the children that are represented in the circle whose responsibility, and it's our responsibility to make sure that they have the truth, to learn the truth so they; so bless them and we thank you Dear God for this day we pray. Amen.

Rev. Nyante: We read this together (Team members read the commissioning together.) Amen. At this time I would like to call on Ms. Eva to give us a brief description of what the demonstration project is about so she will give us a synopsis of what we are witnessing interesting aspects in terms of what will make the project a success.

Eva Shaw-Taylor: The travel journals are at the back of the travel journal. My demonstration project is called Nsaguo in the Akan language which has been called libation by the colonialists who came here. My research that I am doing is whether it should be called Nsaguo – or Libation? Is it a congregational prayer or what exactly is it? At the end of the research I would like to come up with a videotape which shows a particular Nsaguo ceremony that people can use as an educational tool if they would like to go through that process and be able to do it. This is a brief synopsis of my demonstration project.

Rev. Lundy: Can I ask you a question? Why did you choose this subject?

Eva: To me it's a legacy that I am giving to my children. We grew up with our traditions and culture we never questioned why things were done. At a certain point in my life, through education meeting Prof. and you started asking questions – Some of the questions that I asked Prof. Mercy, together with Prof. why do we wear cloth, what are the origins of wearing cloth.

So learning about our culture is a legacy that I am giving to my children so they know how rich our culture is. It is also for my own edification because I don't know a lot about these things and I am learning through this process as well.

Rabbi Jo: In many traditional cultures that have been for a variety of reasons separated from their traditional roots round the world there seems to be a process of coming back and reclaiming the fundamental wellspring of spirituality of the culture and reclaiming and reintroducing the language in preference to English or another or whatever the common language is. How do you see your

project against that background against the broader world background?

Eva:

One of the interesting aspects is that - a lady from my Church St Christopher's Episcopal Church in Maryland she is Celtic, white but she is interested in the process of Nsaguo, so it is a process of dissemination, talking about the culture and teaching other people about our culture and as to the question of whether it should be done in the Ghanaian language versus in English which is the borrowed language, if we want to teach other people about our culture, then it has to be done in English to start with, but in Ghana when you are pouring libation and elsewhere, Ghanaians pouring libation do it in the Ghanaian languages they don't do it in English.

But for the dissemination purposes and the edification of other people you would first teach them in English but hopefully we can start teaching them in the Ghanaian vernacular as well because that is ultimately where you would like to go.

Rev. Nyante

There have been instances where discussions on libation pouring the clergy has discounted the values; do you think that this project will influence them to have a change of mind?

Eva:

I am hoping that will be one of the outcomes, because I believe that, we have and I include myself in that, we have, all of us have dealt on hearsay as opposed to doing actual research to understand the process and, and I believe and I am hoping that we will widely disseminate the meaning of the process, the words that are spoken and during the research we are finding out that what is being done in the process of Nsaguo is no different than some of the Psalms that are in the Bible.

That the priests refer to and are supposed to be reading everyday but one would hope that they would be widely read enough to be able to see the similarities but unfortunately, I believe they have not taken the time to know about their own traditions and culture and that is what is creating the problem and that if they really took the time, to find out speak to the chiefs, speak to the linguists, do their own research they would find out that there is nothing wrong with it because I know a priest who said after he got out of seminary and he came home, libation was poured and he had absolutely no problem with that so I believe it's part of education as well.

Prof:

I think that since you mention the clergy and hopefully I hope your purpose is not going to be to change the minds of the clergy I hope all you want to do is to educate yourself and the clergy to know and understand what libation is and its entirely up to them, it's their choice if they want to but to speak out of ignorance authoritatively as the clergy have done and have influenced many people in the congregation to think negatively about the ritual.

All you are trying to do is to help people to understand what it is because I think they have spoken out of ignorance and with great authority against the ritual also I think your project falls in line with the you said in your question that indigenous people worldwide have had their cultures denigrated authoritatively by people speaking out of books and therefore by denigrating the culture of the people is by denigrating the people but interestingly the indigenous peoples have never abandoned their traditions and what is happening now is a reinterpretation making the world to accept as equal the traditions of other people because all this come together to create a mosaic of different religions and cultures and these exercises like what you are engaging in, will help to bring a greater understanding among people and with the greater understanding hopefully will come peace, religious, political and social.

Rev. Nyante:

One more question – in terms of what I saw in the pictorial the word Nsaguo being by itself a name but then there is no equal to pouring libation so in the end of the project are we going to be saying that there isn't libation or its just Nsaguo. Will that address the issue?

Eva;

Yes, I am hoping that that will be one of the outcomes and that is one of the reasons why I invited Rabbi Jo on my site team. In the five books of the Torah libation was poured but the libation that is described in the Torah is not the same as the process of Nsaguo so I am hoping that at the end of the research some knowledge will come out as whether it should be called libation or not or whether there are other rituals in the Ghanaian tradition that is comparable to the libation as in the Torah.

Rabbi Jo:

Fundamental, spiritual core of Nsaguo

Eva:

I am speaking personally, it's my belief that My parents brought me into this world through God, of course they protected me and took care of me and and took care of me so if my parents have joined the spirit world, I still expect them to provide me with the

same love, comfort and care and so on my parents birthdays when I am performing Nsaguo, I am remembering them and asking them to protect me and make sure no harm comes my way, they should take care of my children. In the same token, when there is a child naming ceremony, the child is being introduced to the clan, to the family that is what I personally believe and as I am doing my research, that belief is being confirmed that the process of Nsaguo is an invitation to my ancestors to join in the activities community activities that are going on.

I believe that personally I call on my grandfather and my grandmother those that I met here and those that I didn't meet to love and care and protect me because if they took care of me when they were alive, why wouldn't they take care of me when they are in a spiritual world believe that in the spiritual world they are more powerful than I am.

Rev. Nyante: Also in terms of Nsaguo, the main theme is about congregational prayer in a way it's a form of prayer specifically it depends on who is praying and that is what we are trying to find out what aspects it relates to the universal prayer.

Rabbi Jo: You mentioned before about the Celtic woman who wants to learn how to perform Nsaguo. The issue of the appropriations of rituals and spirituality by a group for which it is not intended is a large area but in the broader sense whether we want it to happen is another sense. In another sense teaching Nsaguo to many different groups could have a universal and transformative impact on the world.

Eva: Yes to go back to what you stated – nobody knows whether the ritual was not to be performed by Celts. We grew up with it but that does not mean other people cannot do it. It's all about the spirituality that brings it out. Kathy is a shaman and shamanism is practiced by a lot of people.

That is what she recognized when she read the proposal; and it's all about the spirituality she stated that Eva sometimes I can feel my grandfather and my father talking to me and if we accept and recognize that it's within us that God gave us the spirituality and it's not only for one group or community or one specific people. This is an invitation to our ancestors' spirits to join us in making sure that things happen the way we would want them to happen.

Rev. Lundy:

I had a conversation with a native American and I wanted to know about native American spirituality and his response was just the opposite, his response was that if you are a native American, you do not have to ask the question because you already know. If you are asking the question its because you are not a part of the culture, process and heritage so in his case, he was very adamant about guarding very closely those traditions that he has understood to be native American under tradition distinctly.

This was a person out in the Midwest. I spoke with another Native American who said forget about him, come and we will share with you as much as you want to know. You ask us and if we can answer the question, we will do so. So as I listen to Rabbi Jo's question, and your answer, I feel torn – I believe there is something about the African Traditional Religion understanding that even if you give them the information and if the person does not have the sensibility, they will not understand it anyway.

Eva:

Yes Kathy has that spirituality within her so she could feel when she read the proposal, but yesterday in our discussion with Krontihene, he explained that there are certain rituals that not everybody can do. There are certain rituals done in secret that we cannot even videotape I am sure that the first native American was probably referring to those kind of rituals that not everyone can do.

The Nsaguo we are talking about is the Nsaguo done in public for community/congregational activities and this is all part of the research to find out about these rituals. I am hoping to come out with answers to some of these questions – can anybody perform Nsaguo and we were informed that there are two kinds of rituals, one done in public and one done in private.

Rev. Nyante:

Thank you – as she has aid, the deepness that comes from within is what the spirituality is about so at some point when one chooses to bring the spirituality out to relate with the maker, then that person is creating a relationship with the Almighty so if the outcome is able to help people relate in that way, we appreciate the efforts and thank you very much. We go back now to Prof to start the orientation, but before we start; we will do a quick introduction. We will start from this end.

Rev. Nyante, Director of TIDAC, Kofi Asare Opoku, a farmer, Ghanaian representative of TIDAC, Rabbi Jo David, a doctoral candidate of ministry student at NYTS, Eva Shaw-Taylor, doctoral candidate, NYTS, Joyce Boham, IWRC & TIDAC, Rev Chris Foster, Grace Ampiah, George Asiedu, Modupe Oduyoye and Rev. Dr. Wanda Lundy.



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**Rev. Daniel Kwaku Nyante, Executive Director**

**Eva Shaw-Taylor, Deputy Director**

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The Institute for Diasporan and African Culture (TIDAC)

Eva Shaw-Taylor – Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project, New York Theological Seminary (NYTS)

Rabbi Jo David – Multifaith Ministry, NYC

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

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**Group Setting – Disagreement**

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**Signature of person interviewed or photographed:**

I have read the above information, have had the opportunity to ask questions, and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_ I **do not** agree to have a video / tape recording of myself or picture used in the ways described above.

I have received a copy of this document.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewer

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of Interviewer and Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name and Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name and Date

## **GOAL TWO THE INNOVATION**

On December 28, two Kings; Nana Offei Agyemang Krontihene of Akuapem and Nana Osabarima Mamfehene of Akuapem and their entourage came to the TIDAC headquarters for discussions. They came with their Okyeames and gave us insights as to what Nsaguo was about. See Appendix 4. The videographer taped several recordings of the Nsaguo ritual by the following people: 1) The Chief linguist, 2) Krontihene 3) Professor Opoku, and at the Asafosa Peace Ritual and the Durbar.

A transcript of the following interviews can be found in Appendix 7:

- The interview with the two chiefs and their linguists and sub chiefs.
- An interview with Archbishop Peter Sarpong - a retired pastor of the Catholic church who has written several books on African culture and Religion and incorporated cultural ritual and liturgy into his service while a practicing priest at Kumasi, Ghana. See Appendix 9

There were several insights when these interviews were conducted. It was during the orientation session that we found out that there are two types of Nsaguo: 1) a ritual similar to a congregational prayer done in public and 2) a ritual that is only conducted by priests of a deity and is done in private because there are incantations and specific requests are made of the deity. The demonstration project is about the first ritual which can be conducted at any time for any purpose, in a) remembrance of the ancestors and b) in communication with them and asking them to join in whatever activity is going on at that time; a public congregational prayer.

I spoke to Rev. Rosina Ampah who happened to be in New York doing supervised ministry. Rev. Rosina explained to me that she has not incorporated Nsaguo

into her liturgy, however, she is not opposed to performing Nsaguo should the need arise. I had another discussion with Rev. Rosina and the summary of the discussion is attached.

I was not able to videotape the liturgy because as stated before, Rev. Rosina has not incorporated Nsaguo into her liturgy, however, as a priest, she finds nothing wrong in pouring Nsaguo. This point is very important and Rev. Rosina went on further to tell me of an incident that happened to her. Rev. Rosina had built an orphanage in her hometown of Saltpond, which happens to be my hometown as well. She went home to have an open house and invited friends and relatives to come and celebrate with her. In our tradition, an occasion like this, would call for the performing of Nsaguo; so after saying the necessary prayers, Rev. Rosina asked for a bottle of schnapps and she performed Nsaguo asking God and her ancestors to be part of the festivities.

There was a relative who considered himself to be a “Born Again Christian” who even though he had a problem did not voice it out until he was on his way home with Rev. Rosina’s sister. He asked Rev. Rosina’s sister why did Rev. Rosina a priest, performed Nsaguo and her sister’s response was, why are you asking me? I did not perform the Nsaguo, why don’t you go back and ask her yourself? He never did. As my challenge statement stated, most Ghanaian “Born Again Christian” frown on Nsaguo performing because they feel it is against the Christian faith.

The video tape was received however in discussing the issue of editing and translation with my site team, it was decided that it would be better to have the videotape in English. The format would be to use the other Nsaguo rituals as examples of true life experiences. The videotapes of the different rituals were received and incorporated into



one. The educational video would be viewed first and then the real/true life experience videos will follow.

The educational video on Nsaguo was performed by my advisor Professor Kofi Asare Opoku in English so there was no need for a translation. His words are what will also be used in the handbook. The educational video will be available for sale at the TIDAC website after the demonstration project has been approved and after graduation. There was no need to edit the video tapes because the educational video was done in English. Based on the educational videos, the decision was made by the site team to use the other videos as examples of real life situations where Nsaguo is being performed and hence did not need translation.





































**MEETING WITH THE CHIEFS  
DECEMBER 28, 2009**

- Rev. Nyante: I'd like to introduce the Krontihene who is the chief of this town and I'd like to start the self introductions starting with the Okyeame who speaks on behalf of the Chief.
- Linguist: My name is Okyeame Yeboah, Nana Akyeamehene Acheampong, Chief linguist to Nana Krontihene, Osahene Offei Kwasi Agyemang IV
- Rev. Nyante: At this time we are going to start the program and I'd like Eva to proceed with her questions.
- Eva: Good Morning, I am happy and grateful that we are all here today to witness the beginning of this demonstration project. The process will be as follows: We will all go out and witness the performance of Nsaguo, after which we will come in and have the chiefs answer the interview questions I have prepared. In the tradition, we wait for the king to lead and then we will follow. We all stand for the king to arise.
- Krontihene: Why we go outside is we normally have to create space for the ancestors to join in. So always when the linguist is pouring libation, we make sure that no one stands in front of him. If we do it outside, so much the better so the ancestors can enter from wherever they want to. We dream and things are communicated to us – we are asking for blessing for Rev. Nyante, may he dream good dreams pray for all those who are helping him, pray for those who are taking advantage to know our culture so that is what they will be performing.

*After the Nsaguo, everyone takes a drink of the schnapps used.*

Interview session

- Krontihene: The chief linguist giving some of the drink before starting the libation - the gist if it is that the purpose is to make sure that the drink we are using is authentic because you do not want to give any kind of drink which is bad to the ancestors otherwise you do not want to provoke their anger or fury from the ancestors.
- The gist of what the linguist said was that he started with an appeal to God – we also know that we believe that the earth that we live on has much to do with our lives so after mentioning God's name, he mentioned the earth. The gist of what he said is an appeal to the ancestors telling them about what Rev. Nyante started and mentioned Rev. Nyante's grandfather and father asking them to join us. Rev. Nyante conceived of a great project spelt out the purpose of the project mentioned Eva wanted them to mention her ancestors with Prof. Opoku, acknowledged the

presence of Osahene and Osabarima. Akyeamehene. Mamfehene came with a whole retinue of his people acknowledged the blessings to be present and blessings for the particular project.

Especially those who flew in from the US coming and going back. When it ended, the linguist used one glass to share the drink among the witnesses. If you had anything to add you could do it but most of the time, people do not do that. When he was done, he announced that he was done and he was congratulated by those around him on a job well done.

Mamfehene: At the end the linguist stated that– everyone who will have ill will towards the project must be dealt with by the ancestors. I was drawing Eva’s attention to the fact that there are similar words in the Bible so I asked for a Bible to Psalm 35. That is exactly the meaning that he was trying to convey. This has been with us for ages before the Bible came. It does not mean that I don’t believe what the Bible says but what our people have had their own way of worshipping God – who they think is the Creator.

Prof. Opoku: Just one comment about the drinking of the liquor prior to the pouring of libation. In the past, we used palm wine and palm wine changes taste as the days go by and our ancestors, the elders wanted to ensure that the drink that was used in the pouring of libation, had the right taste and so there was and still is an official at the chief’s court called Esen – the person who keeps order in the chief’s court.

And He is the one who taste the drink to make sure that it is order and that the drink used is fit to be used in the performance of the libation. But the Esen is also the court official who symbolizes order - - he also has an effect on the drums. If you want to know what the drums say. A lot of history is stored in the drum text.

One of the drum text says in the beginning, God created three things: the Esen, the Okyerema and Kwahu Bra – death and our ancestors’ way of saying that this is an orderly universe, followed by the master drummer, the creator’s own drummer – a symbol of knowledge – very knowledgeable is the drummer after order came knowledge. There knowledge then there is death. This is a summary of the human experience.

Nyante: ***Why gin and not water?***

Prof. You can use water, or palm wine or gin has acquired a distinction – especially imported gin.

- Nyante: Spirits evaporate – spiritual significance – when you open the gin, it will evaporate.
- Prof: In the olden days, when they started in the forest, small hole in the tree called God’s tree. The rainwater that fell in that hole or a pot that was placed under the tree was what was used to pour libation and also purify women after their menstrual period was over. On the coast, you use coconut water instead of palm wine.
- Rabbi Jo: ***You spoke and they responded – what were they saying? when they were pouring the libation.***
- Krontihene: Prof explained the reason why they used. Part of the ritual is to prompt the ancestors to listen to the request.
- Okyeame: It is also a prompting for the people around to be quite and listen to what is going on.
- Wanda: I thought it was an Amen.
- Krontihene: It could be interpreted that way as well.
- Oduyoye: ***Do you use Akpeteshie – the local hard liquor?***
- Akyeamehene: We don’t.
- Krontihene: We will make it clear that there are 2 types of Nsaguo. There is the one done by the fetish priests that are done for the deities.
- Mamfehene: If within a small group they’ve met to have discussions on their own be inclined to pour libation and Yes anyone can be asked to pour libation under certain circumstances but not at the chief’s court.
- Oduyoye: ***What does Kasapreko refer to?***
- Krontihene: Kasapreko in our language means let all persons speak.
- Okyeame Acheampong: Almost like speak now and speak well.
- Eva: ***Mamfehene, what made you accept to be a traditional leader?***
- Mamfehene: I am part of the royal family – Akan when the stool became vacant, I was one of those eligible and nominated to ascend to the throne. For personal reasons I did not have a choice – I belonged to my forefathers who passed it on and if the elders of my family have seen it fit to select me, who am I to refuse?
- Eva: ***Krontihene have you had to make any personal or spiritual sacrifices in order to serve as a traditional ruler?***

Krontihene: Yes you have to given all the checks and balances. My personal experience was I was living in the Us employed by one of the best companies in the Us and earning good money. My uncle died and I was summoned; my supervisor, a white Jew thought I was crazy to give up all I had to come back home and rule with no compensation. But when you have lived in the chief's court, you know how things are done and sometimes you feel in your youth that you can help make things work better.

Eva ***Mamfehene was it a problem for you as a Christian?***

Mamfehene: I do not let the Christian inhibitions affect me. According to the average Christian as a chief you cannot pour libation, you cannot drink some also feel that there is fetishism in chieftaincy. You are supposed to be worshipping the stool idols. Those who make these assertions probably make them out of ignorance because they do not understand what the chieftaincy is about and so are speaking from a point of view where you are.

If I am a Christian and I am also part of the system, I know what the difference is and then I say yeas, I have a responsibility as a chief to visit my stool room every 6 weeks to confer with my ancestors. You go in there to be told the history of your existence, of the throne, of the stool and of the community. You go there to enrich your knowledge to be able to dispense justice and know what everything is about. They do not want everyone to know what goes on there to have an air of secrecy around it.

If I have to pour libation, assuming its in New York, I say the Good Lord who is above, the Almighty Creator knows that my being a chief is to perform some service to my people so its not by my grace or by my might or by my righteousness that I will be saved or condemned but its by his grace so I say intermittently Lord, I am doing this and if it is against your wishes, pardon me but this is a role I have to play as Mamfehene so if you can separate my role as Mamfehene because I need to do that for salvation and I have faith and trust in the Lord to appreciate what I am saying because getting what I am saying comes straight from the heart.

I believe in what I am saying and I do it and I do not allow the negatives of what other people are saying to affect my duties. I will not knowingly do an injustice against God but as human beings we are not perfect and are bound to sin – once one can or asks for forgiveness, I know he will forgive me and I will continue to serve in any capacity, if that is what I am supposed to do sure I'll do it without any problems at all.

Eva: ***Thank you – Krontihene what are your personal thoughts on Nsaguo as a traditional leader?***

Krontihene: Knowing what I know about my traditional activities and customs of my people, I am very comfortable with Nsaguo. Contrary to what some Christians will let other people believe, this has got nothing at all to do with Christianity. I go in there knowing that I am not worshipping any deity and like Mamfehene said, I am a Christian and I believe in what Christ says.

When I go in there I know that what I am doing is not contrary to what I have learnt as a Christian so I am very comfortable. I know that its part of our history that with our ancestors play a big part in our lives anything that we do, we invite our ancestors even the unborn because that is how we understand our community to be. Our people comprises of the living, the dead and the unborn because and so when I go in there, I am dealing with people as a Christian.

When I read the Bible, I read that the Jews call on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Jews are calling on their ancestors and it didn't mean that they were worshipping Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I am not Jew so I cannot call on Abraham or Isaac as my ancestors, I can call on them as far as the Christian ritual because that goes to identify the God that I serve as part of my custom and as the chief linguist did, when he wanted blessings on Rev. Nyante.

He called on one of his ancestors, our chiefs are buried somewhere out there and when he wanted to explain that if anyone who wants to come from the outside to disrupt the project we are doing, he is calling on them to take care of them now. I am very comfortable with the pouring of Nsaguo and I don't want to use the word libation because of the negative connotation that Christians in this country have given that ritual.

Rabbi Jo: ***What is it about Christianity that brings something to the Traditional Religion? If the Traditional Religion solved all the spiritual and theological questions then I am making the assumption that for someone they would not have a need for another religion. So what is it that Christianity brings that completes the spiritual connectiveness that you feel?***

Krontihene: As an individual I share the view that Mamfehene mentioned about serving his people. That is a noble idea enshrined in Christianity. Jesus as coming into the world making some sacrifices to actually serve so others might gain wisdom, knowledge, salvation, that is what is attractive to me as a person about Christ. I don't think that it is incompatible with the system that we have or the God we serve or the role that has been

bestowed upon us. Because you are to serve your people, you have to make certain sacrifices if you don't know that then you probably belong to the wrong place in this time.

Rabbi Jo: ***Mamfehene may I ask the same question to you in a slightly different way? If you only had your traditional Religion can you think of things that or areas that you would be searching – spiritually searching in?***

Mamfehene: I would say that in a lot of ways, the reason why I did not have a problem with being a traditional ruler and a Christian is that I see a certain seamless relationship and meditation would come whether you are a Christian, Buddhist or Traditionalist. At this time we are supposed to ban noisemaking in Mamfe, the reason being we are getting to the festival period and the elders and all of us need to have a period of quietness to meditate to spiritually uplift ourselves.

When the elders went to perform the ritual, one of the admonitions was that all men should stay away from their wives for me what it means is you are setting yourself apart, getting yourself purified for the task ahead during the festivities so if there was no Christianity I shouldn't have any problem because there are some of the things that are inherent in the Traditional Religion that are also in Christianity maybe its just a continuation , an enrichment because what we did not have was to put down our things in writing and a lot of people have looked and researched and expanded the frontiers and these are some of the things hat Christianity brought to us.

People have written countless books and so things are explained away easily. So whereas Christianity opens up to all manner of things, there are some of our things that are protected. There are things in Christianity that are not also known. People must have in depth knowledge to be able to practice them.

We do not have it in writing and so things are passed on orally. The elders will not look at you and may be tell you something because they feel that this knowledge may be too much for him and he may not use it in the right way and for the wrong purposes so I do not have a problem with this at all.

Prof: Christianity has a prestige value in all forms of religion. For those who are practicing their ancient Traditional Religion in private may publicly prefer to be known as Christians simply because of the prestige value attached with the introduction of Christianity.

Besides, Christianity came with many material associations and this is what made Christianity so attractive especially in Ghana but the

interesting thing is that when the crux is on, the people may not practice Christianity. Christianity and Islam in particular, place a lot of emphasis on what the person believes but in our Traditional Religion, what matters is that the person is who he is and that he is a human being but in Christianity and Islam, those two in particular place a person must believe this.

Christians must believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior but I am a farmer and on the farm and in the observance of the rituals, I will not bring all the palm fruit from the farm but I will follow my tradition and cut a little bit of the palm fruit and leave it on the farm before I come home and this has nothing to do with my Christianity. Christianity came with its own Western European expression of Christianity and if you take the culture away from Christianity, we can live with it and that is why most people accept Christianity.

Don't commit murder, do not steal, these are all things we practiced all this from time immemorial earlier than the advent of Christianity but the material advantages of Christianity and the social prestige is what made it so attractive.

Rev Nyante:

I also think that Christianity has been presented in a way that is easier to follow in the Traditional Religion, there seems to be experiences which have to be learned and you have to be involved because most of the learning in the Traditional is oral there isn't the consistency so if someone deviates in telling you what you are trying to understand, it creates confusion; whereas Christianity has references where you are able to check and quote and to me that is what Nana is saying but then if you have a set up that helps you to consistently observe it, you continue to do it because there is help that you get in a way so it becomes easier.

Eva:

To add to that we talked about the fact that the more educated you are the more you get to appreciate your traditional culture. And you realize that just as Mamfehene said, there are so many similarities and its almost as if Christianity did to teach us anything new and that is important to capture the important aspects of our culture for our children so they realize that they have a choice and its is that there should not be either or that that should not be tension between being a Christian or being an African Traditionalist.

Mamfehene:

***When you say the more educated I almost disagree with you – if you mean educated in terms of having a higher degree or get to a certain level?***

Eva:

Getting to a certain level – the more you read about Theology, and the African Traditional Religion, the more you realize in doing research that



you see the similarities. I did not know much about African Traditional religion until I started tacking these theological courses.

Mamfehene: I have no problem with that – I thought you meant Doctorate etc.

Prof: They are the most brainwashed people on earth.

Wanda: In light of the conversation we just had, Prof. Opoku saying earlier about the laboratory, we were talking about, the similarities and how it seems that there are things that are similar and I think it goes back to the point where there isn't one that is better than the other. This is about a book that I am sure Prof. Opoku knows about

Dr. Ben He lays out the things that African Origins about Major Western Religions and he lays out how Christianity and Islam ascribed to started here. The truth is the truth regardless of what language it is spoken in and who speaks it, so for me the journey is to go back to the beginning and affirm what we all believe whether it's Christianity, Judaism or Islam that its about the truth. The truth of who we are as a people and none of them have the exclusive right of saying we are the first or we are the best or we do it the right way because all of them came from the same source.

Eva: ***Mamfehene what role do your ancestors play in your life?***

Mamfehene: Some of the deeds, some of their beliefs, some of their actions, you can only have an experience you have lived through a certain situation, but you have history to guide you. If you know that during a, b, c, d period time presented with such a situation, this is the course of action that such ancestors attitude then you will be informed of what to do.

There is something that I cannot explain but sometimes when one is in deep thought, certain things just pop up into my head that previously I had no idea, no clue but they just pop into my head. If its God that is speaking to me or if its my ancestors who are showing me the way, if its some spirit being that is guiding me I have no idea but them with regards to what I am supposed to do as the chief; the kind of things that I get to know sometimes they marvel me and so I have people who will sometimes say how did you know about this is it magic or witchcraft? The ancestors play a significant role if I fail it's because the foundation built was not solid enough, but if I do well, then the foundation was good.

Prof: All of us are influenced by our ancestors; we are influenced by the names we bear. We are all named after an ancestor and no one is named after a bad ancestor because we bear the characteristics of the ancestors whose names we bear. Names are character forming.

- Rev. Nyante: I had this story told to me by a medical doctor, who said he would constantly play tennis with his white counterpart. Every time he would go on the court he would pray to God to help him win. This happened 3 times and each time he lost.
- The fourth time he called on his ancestors and said I have called on God many times and this time I am calling on you to help me win this game and he won. What is in your heart your beliefs system that will help you achieve what you want. This is what people will see.
- Eva: ***What is Nsaguo – what is this ritual?***
- Krontihene: What I heard Prof say this morning summed up what the ritual is about. It is a ritual that is used to access our ancestors or deities and I am saying a deity knowing or remembering that there are 2 kinds of Nsaguo but there is the accessing of our ancestors and the is the invoking of the deities by the fetish priests. But it is the ritual that is done to invite our ancestors that we are currently talking about.
- Mamfehene: It is a form of communication between oneself whether you can call, it a higher being or some beings that you cannot see with the naked eye. Someone will say it's a prayer some will say is an incantation but then its communication because the Christians communicate with God through Jesus Christ and the Muslims communicate with God through Mohammed whilst they are doing it, they count their rosary beads and in the African Traditional religion, they do that as just a communication to a being that is outside of oneself that cannot be seen with the naked eye.
- Akyeamehene: It's a communication with the deities to invoke the spirits.
- Oduyoye: ***Do you have a totem system here?***
- Krontihene: When someone dies, we assume he goes to the same place and assume that they are welcomed and there is no death. There is continuation. You have this life and join the others. There will be a funeral pouring of libation will occur to tell him that the latest family member is joining them, then tell them about the latest issues facing the community.
- Mamfehene: There are stories of a people in come that have come back to say they saw their grandparents and great great grandparents and they have asked them what are you doing here? Go back so passing away is not the end of life.
- Rev. Nyante: In sleeping is like death in sleeping we are not aware of our sense. A form of communication.

- Prof. When you sleep, your sumsum goes out of your body to experience the things out of your body.
- Eva: ***Is there an age restriction on when you can perform Nsaguo or can anybody at any age perform the Nsaguo?***
- Okyeame: No child under 18 years can perform Nsaguo unless that child is eloquent and has learnt about the tradition. You have to be appointed you just cannot do it if you do it in private, perhaps you want to curse somebody and if you get caught, there will be trouble so it isn't something you joke with.
- Eva: ***If I want to pour libation in remembrance of my parents or grandparents is that allowed?***
- Okyeamehene: It is allowed but you should have one family member with you when you do that unless sometimes you are overseas and there is nobody around when you do it.
- Wanda: One of the rituals that we have tried to affirm and embrace in the African American Community in the United States is the pouring of libation and based on what you just said about age and the needing to be an ancestor, what does it say about leaders or people who are trying to find a way to connect to Africa? Is there a proper way to pour libation?
- Mamfehene: If we are here as a group and all kinds of ages you would not choose a 10, 12 or 15 year old to do the congregational prayer unless of course that individual is a title person doing it. The probably how old he is would not matter and then when he is properly schooled and knows how to go about it, they will find someone who is older to do it.
- You will find a chief and if he is gone through the education, no one can stop him from pouring libation but this is different from the African American as much as you want to encourage you, you need to know the right way to pour the libation.
- Okyeamehene: My grandfather was Okyeame and so I started pouring libation when I was in class 3.
- Eva: ***How long is the training process?***
- Okyeamehene: There is no training – it's a gift my grandfather was a linguist sometimes the way someone behaves in the King's court, they may be asked to be trained to become one.
- Mamfehene: Depends on the setting. If it's in the palace, then the chief linguist will be called upon to do that as the Krontihene said, it was not necessary to add anything to it.

- Rabbi Jo: ***In the palace, Nsaguo will only be performed by the linguist us that correct? Other people can do their own thing but the formal thing will be done by the linguist?***
- Krontihene: Sometimes if I am in the palace and the linguist is not available, one of the chiefs can be called upon to pour libation.
- Rabbi Jo: ***Outside of the palace for the family situation any member of the family can do it right?***
- Okyeamehene: Yes the head of the family can do it.
- Rabbi Jo: So it's not a question if someone does it in the family its Kosher. It does not break any rules as long as it's not being done in the place in a formal setting like the palace.
- Eva: The next question is about practicing the ritual overseas – is there a formal way of doing it and we realize that it has to be a congregational prayer. Can Jo do it if Jo wants to communicate with her ancestors?
- Krontihene: The requirements are the same, really if there is a group they will find the appropriate person maybe the one who knows about the ritual. The acknowledged leader will do it. There is nothing written against it. There are people who have been trained here who can do it there. When we have child naming ceremonies the people are called to do the ritual,. There is nothing against doing it.
- Okyeamehene: In the US if you wake up in the morning and you feel that you have a problem and things are not going well, you can pour libation and ask the ancestors to guide you and help you through your problems.
- Eva: ***Do you see any relationship in the practice of Nsaguo and peace in the world?***
- Krontihene: When you have a festival, the whole ceremony is preceded by a prayer and the Nsaguo prayer includes a prayer for peace in the world, peace in the community, etc but as part of our individual festivals, we pray for the peace of the communities and the world.
- Okyeamehene: Last year a certain professor came round with a questionnaire and I told him that there are certain things that can only be solved by chiefs. How do we solve problems = it is not for the politicians to solve our problems we have a way of solving our own problems. They can try but it will not work.
- Mamfehene: World peace is a global thing you can achieve, solve big things by starting with the small things. So by the Nsaguo prayer you are asking for the good of the community and good neighborliness. I believe when

everyone says there is a certain linkage that will have a certain relationship starting with Krontihene at Akropong, the Akuapem, then other regions, in Ghana this will have a ripple effect on world peace. One of the ingredients is to have peace and we will be on the way to world peace.

- Wanda: Is the fetish priest is it that everything they do is not positive?
- Mamfehene: No.
- Wanda: I was getting the impression that the fetish priest always negative.
- Krontihene: The fetish invokes the deity and asks for a certain favor. We have focused on a certain aspect of Nsaguo. If you don't have a fetish priest, if you wanted to experience what they do, we can go there and go through what they actually do. Some are very powerful and they can let things happen.
- Wanda: I go to God and ask for good things and bad things so how is that different?
- Mamfehene: He is not asking God – he is asking a certain deity.
- Nyante: Does that deity exist on its own? The creator created the deity and so it is by us to ask for the good and positive aspects when you develop the negative aspects of it.
- Krontihene: They have more discipline than the Christians.
- Mamfehene: If Christians would live their lives by those principles, there won't be a lot of evil in the world. A man puts his pen here – do not take it, if you take it you will die. If you do take it then you know that you will die.
- Nyante: All powers are from God and so in any deity, if you look for the good things it is for the good of society then it's good. So these deities would not have any more power than God.
- Rabbi Jo: Judaism has its angels who do specific work for God so this is not different from Judaism e.g. Rafael, We invoke them in a variety of ways we call God in many ways – we visualize those things and that is what we need God for. They have a specific purpose and how do the priests become the priests of that deity?
- Mamfehene: There is a general belief that as people worship God through Jesus, Muslims through Mohammed, we speak through our ancestors because we are not worthy of speaking directly to God, we have to speak through somebody/ Some people worship God through the deities objects that he has created. Lesser deities through whom they speak then you have

totems then you have the ancestors, higher than the deities with God at the pinnacle.

If you are chief every power is below you and they cannot affect you because the group who are protecting you are higher than them. If you do it right no one can touch you but if you do it wrong, all manner of things can affect you. It is a free form of worship but we are all communicating with the Supreme Being.

Krontihene: Historically every chief had a deity to help him when we were warring against each other, the chief was not a priest – deities and a priest assigned duties to protect the clan. That is going away. Even though we have the deity the elders, the community the leaders of the community were the chief priests overtime what I have experienced as a chief, you sit there and something comes to you and you do it. It boggles my mind.

Initially I wasn't sure of what to expect. In the 10 years of being a chief I have experienced certain positive things and if you serve the stool well, it brings it will serve you well but if you do things that brings the stool into disrepute, then you will suffer the consequences. You have to ascribe to the tenets of the stool and I strongly believe that if I were to get another deity, I will be punished.

Mamfehene: Sometimes we say send us good dreams and what it actually means is that speak to us and we get spoken to all the time. Things pop up in your mind there may be a huge problem and I lie down quietly and at the end of the day a solution comes in your mind – it does not make me special.

Krontihene: Sometimes I mention someone's name and 5 minutes later, he appears and you get frightened and I don't want to say anything and you don't want to tell anyone for fear of what they will call you.

Wanda: This thought of different peoples in the universe, it seems the Creator has given each of the people a gift and they are the guardians of it. It is important for the holders to hold it tight I say it to you as guardians to hold it tight. I am very encouraged and hold it tight.

Rabbi Jo: Do you think its possible not only The African people but indigenous people who follow their tradition may be more connected and receptive to these – is possible.

Rev. Nyante: It does not matter truth is what us important. In our effort to be inclusive and cont contain ourselves,

Wanda: I am not trying to be exclusive – it seems as that as soon as we get something, it is snatched away from us and as an African American, holding on to what has been taken away from us is very important to me.

- Mamfehene: 20 or 30 years ago, one could pluck two leaves incant certain words and vanish. We had such people when they figured such powers were too powerful to be in the hands of just anyone. Did not have a structured system looks around and decides that this one can carry it on.
- With formal education, people felt this was not God's plan so succeeding generations instead of putting their minds together in all things they rejected out offhand. Menstruation woman in their menses tales away something from a spiritual person and this is why in the Bible the woman who had been hemorrhaging for 2 years and touched Jesus, caused him to feel that some of his powers had been taken away.
- As people are going to the moon, developing computers what the African can contribute and bring to the table has been diminished. May be we may have deeper insights.
- Nyante: Some of the denigrations has taken something away. There is no understanding as to what it means – so by being able to understand our tradition, the way of life lived by our ancestors.
- Krontihene: It appears we are overdoing it. The more you are aware because the more aware you are the more you appreciate your culture. We have complexes that have been created because we do not understand our own traditions and culture.
- You are urging us to protect certain feelings we have of ourselves. We have a lot of things going on - some children are bathed with certain leaves and they are actually stronger than the average child. There are certain leaves many pharmaceuticals we are surrounded by them.

**Meeting with Archbishop Sarpong  
December 29, 2009**

Prof. Opoku: I have with me Rev. Nyante a doctoral candidate – soon to be Rev. Dr. Nyante and he has created an Institute - The Institute for Diasporan and African Culture (TIDAC), a forum where people are free to discuss any topic without the great men of the cloth breathing down our necks. Rev. Nyante brings a few colleagues and students to study our culture and its relationship to Christianity and other faiths a number of times.

This time another doctoral student Eva Shaw-Taylor doing a study on libation we have been discussing a number of subjects at Akropong and we contacted you and you graciously accepted to meet us. They have all heard about you and secondly want to wish you a prosperous and happy new year and a most enjoyable prosperous retirement. We came to visit you and to have a conversation with you.

Archbishop Sarpong: The honor is all mine, it's a privilege; it happens that I have a few visitors from England and they know that you are here and there will be here around this time. You did tell me you would have visitors. I went to my village for Christmas and left at 3 to drive over here to wait for you; I have been expecting you and I am very happy.

I know you wouldn't be here if you didn't love us. To have come from that far away, your presence here is a poof of love. I have known Prof for many years. We worked together in Philadelphia in 1976 and the Eucharistic conference. Everyone knows who Prof. is. You are welcome and we have a small program for you – we have started the program with a conversation – I have a small group of entertainment. You are welcome and I hope the time you spend here with me will be enjoyable. Thank you very much. We have a famous musician among us and so we feel very privileged.

Rev. Nyante: doing the introductions – Rabbi Jo, Eva Shaw-Taylor,

Eva Shaw-Taylor: Demonstration project on Nsaguo – Libation I have actually read Archbishop Sarpong's book on libation felt very privileged when Prof. said we could come over and talk to you personally, so that is why we are here.



Rabbi Jo: A rabbi from New York

Professor Opoku: Farmer at the Akuapem Mountains – 30 cares in the mountains – 2 farms Ananse akura African University in Accra

Director At the cultural Center in Kumasi

Veronica: Human Resources Specialist in England; came for holidays.

Rev. Chris: Presby Minister from Providence Rhode Island. Congregation decided – it's time for her to be in Ghana – it's my first time in Ghana. Happy to know that you were in Rhode Island

Rev. Lundy: Pastor Church at the Edge – Faculty at NYTS –

Curtis Lundy: Jazz musician – loves God's music

Mr. Thompson: A lawyer practice in Nottingham – first visit to Kumasi and Ghana – Member of the Church of England

Rev. Nyante: Doing a demonstration project on Onyamesom and Kristosom.

Archbishop Sarpong: First visit to Ghana for the 3 of you Ordained December 11 1959 became archbishop 2002 – may last year retired – have to retire at the age of 75 – wanted me to continue to have one bishop for 40 years – it's too much and we are waiting for the inevitable – the reason why I became a priest anyway. I am very happy to have you with me. I was in Leicester last September. Sarpong prays for the whole group.

The group partakes in the dinner.

Eva: Ghanaians are being reeducated about our culture. Some Ghanaians seem not to really know too much about our culture. I felt that it was important when Rev. Nyante wanted to establish Institute based on the question whether Onyamesom was established before Christianity was introduced to Ghana. These are some of the subjects that TIDAC is interested in. It was a very touchy subject for me because some members of my family will have a problem using liquor in the child naming ceremony but would perform the ceremony anyway.

And so the question the significance as to why our elders chose liquor and water when performing a child naming ceremony is an important one. One of the outcomes I hope to achieve is whether

the ritual should be called libation or Nsaguo, and whether we can compare the ritual to that of the libation in the Torah because yesterday we had a discussion with two kings and it seems there are some rituals similar to libation in the Torah but the congregational prayer is not the same.

Rev. Nyante: I read this article where the writer was stating that the name Nsaguo does not have an English meaning.

Rabbi Jo: Also there is a reemergence of the understanding of traditional practices and maintain the traditional names in whatever language in the ritual it comes from. It is not out of the bounds of reality to introduce the word Nsaguo to the American society. So if it's Nsaguo, its Nsaguo, you don't have to translate it.

Archbishop Sarpong: Very interesting.

Rabbi Jo: May I ask, when you mentioned that your home is near here when you were growing up, was your family actually practicing the traditional religion?

Archbishop Sarpong: My mother was born catholic. My father became Catholic three months after my birth. We lived together in a hamlet. My father had 4 siblings: one was a traditional priest who became Catholic, another was catholic and became a traditional priest. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of my fathers was always Catholic. In my culture, my father's brother is my father; my father who came after him became a catholic three months after I was baptized.

I lived in a multifaith atmosphere first hand. I did not have to research; I know what my uncles were doing. I know their principles of life, I know their philosophies of life and I knew what my father and my mother were expected to do. When I grew up and did theology, honestly I did not find any substantial differences between the belief of my uncles and the belief of the Catholic Church.

The basic belief in a Supreme Being who has his own name, is kind and eternal nothing specifically Christian. There are things in Christianity that are specifically Christian. The basis of it all – is the same and that is what made me go to Oxford to do anthropology after completing my studies in Rome. When I was doing the subjects, the knowledge of God, it was piling up,

philosophy of esoteric terms but at the end, God is kind, God is one, God is our master. So I picked up a lot from the environment in which I grew up.

If you read my articles, I just don't like quoting somebody. If you ask me to write, as I have noticed myself, I remember Prof, there was an anthropological journal edited by Ford. I wrote an article for that journal: Ashanti Concept of a Human Person. What they told me was that I had not taken into account what Danquah had said what Rattray had said so if I wanted to be published, I had to take into account what Danquah, Rattray or Ford had said. Then I said my article will not be published because I like to write on what I think I know, I may be wrong but I will not quote someone because they said so.

Rev. Nyante: The same person who talked about Nsaguo, critiques Danquah's work and said Danquah just quoted and did not find the facts but he should not have quoted from Rattray because he assumed that what Rattray said was fact,

Archbishop Sarpong: So I lived in that situation for 10 years, whenever I saw the walls of a classroom. 10 years is a lot and I learnt a lot.

Rev. Nyante: In your time, what was your experience as to your traditional beliefs in seminary?

Archbishop Sarpong: In seminary, I sat down and compared the two religions and asked "what is the difference between the two?"

Prof. Opoku what did your colleagues ask about your work? What did they say about your work?

Archbishop Sarpong: What I got my doctorate in is moral theology. Most people did not know that I did moral theology – most people do not know that I am a moral theologian. I did anthropology to the Masters level; to answer your question, they liked what I wrote and when I give talks, they are happy.

In Philadelphia when I gave a talk, I got a standing ovation. I was reported to Rome and Rome asked me to submit my text to them. I did and that was the end of it. I had used 2 or 3 harsh words and so they had to say something but that was the end.

- Eva: You have written a book on libation. I would like to know your understanding of Nsaguo as opposed to libation.
- Archbishop Sarpong: You were saying that libation is not a correct translation of Nsaguo. If you go by that kind of thing then no word has a right translation. Even Father can never be translated in the right way in Akan. If you say father, you mean someone who brought you into this world, or someone who may have adopted you, but in Akan, Adja can be translated as my father and my father's brothers.
- So I find it difficult when I hear that Nsaguo cannot be translated as libation. Because all these terms can otherwise not to be translated.
- Rev. Nyante: The point was the name is Nsaguo – it may be close to libation but it's not Libation.
- Prof. Opoku There is some kind of hair splitting.
- Archbishop Sarpong: If you mean in the way of St Paul's life being poured out as libation, then yes it's not the same as Nsaguo.
- Eva; As a Chrtsian do you think the practice of Nsaguo or libation goes against the teaching of Christianity?
- Archbishop Sarpong: I don't think so, I don't see why it should go against the teachings of Christianity. If anything, it strengthens the teaching of Christianity.
- Eva: In what way?
- Archbishop Sarpong: Christianity teaches the existence of God, Christianity teaches the existence of spirits good and bad, Christianity teaches the existence and belief in saints who once lived in our lives, and have satisfied certain conditions and supposedly live n a place with no pain. That is what Christianity is teaching.
- Christianity's concept of the spirit may not coincide with the concept of abosom. They are spirits good and bad just as in Christianity, there are spirits good and bad. As Prof said, if we want to split hairs we can look at the concept and say are they the same? Dei Uno, my people don't believe there are many Gods, they believe there is only one God.

There is no difference between what I believed then and now.

Rabbi Jo: Do you pour libation in church?

Archbishop Sarpong: To say something is not bad does not mean you are using it; my problem is with those who say libation is bad. It does not mean I use libation in a church setting but at home I do. But you are talking about in a worship situation not that can't but knowing that some people are so dead against libation that to use it in church means I will be imposing my ideas on people and they should come to church in a friendly atmosphere and not to fight them.

Rabbi Jo: What if someone came and asked you to be present at an activity where libation will be poured? Would you preside over such an activity.

Archbishop Sarpong: Yes.

Prof. Opoku: There was an incident in my family a few years ago. There was an activity and the elders of the church came to visit. They asked us to pray and everybody present prayed. After the prayer, the elder of the family said they would pour libation and then all the elders of the church. No one walked away when we were asked to pray.

Archbishop Sarpong: I do not understand that kind of thing. I think I tried to explain it in one of my books.

Rev. Lundy: From the bottom of our hearts we thank you for opening your home to us and for all those who have gathered with us and on behalf of TIDAC and NYTS, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Maryland and the people of Ghana, we thank you for all the years you have invested, for bringing us up to this point that we can enjoy the work you have done.

Everything we have experienced sums up what you have said which is Libation helps us keep up the godliness.

### **GOAL THREE THE GIFT**

I was invited to the Ebenezer Methodist Church in Hyattsville to talk about my demonstration project. Unfortunately their priest who was very much interested in the project had to leave. The leaders of the church have not been able to set a time for me to make a presentation for them because they are now actively trying to recruit a new priest. I also feel that the presentation will go better with the endorsement of the priest. I intend to follow up and give this presentation even after the presentation of the demonstration project.

St Christopher's Church is undergoing a change, trying to grapple with the search for a new rector and grappling with a few other issues. There were too many situations for St. Christopher's which led me to believe that I may not get enough people to attend the workshop to make the research viable. Waiting till after graduation would still work because eventually, I intend to produce a book out of this demonstration project.

TIDAC was asked and agreed to visit Rev. Chris Foster's Presbyterian Church in Rhode Island to present the educational videotape. Rev. Chris Foster who was a member of my team in Ghana was very interested in having a workshop on Nsaguo. So when the video was ready, I was able to establish a date – December 12, 2010. I went over to Providence, Rhode Island and worshipped with Rev Chris. Rev. Chris had sent out email alerts about the workshop. After church service and their coffee hour, 30 participants joined us in the basement of the church. They were presented with a pre-video questionnaire and a post-video questionnaire. See Appendix 12 for the pre and post questionnaire.

VIDEO

































































































Among the Akan, it is believed that when good people die, they go to a place of bliss known as Asamando. They do not suffer pain, deformity or any kind of hardship. They lead the life that they were leading on earth in peace. It is the belief that from Asamando, the ancestor can come back to be reborn in order to finish a job he started but could not complete it. The African family/community therefore comprises of the unborn, the living and the dead which is similar to the Church's doctrine of the Church suffering, the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant.<sup>291</sup>

### **Nsaguo ceremony**

Nsaguo consists of the pouring of the liquid and the invocation of the Supreme Being and the ancestors, which is accompanied by the act of pouring. The procedure is as follows:

1. First, the oldest family member in a family gathering or a chief linguist in an official gathering is asked to pour Nsaguo.
2. He /she asks for a deputy to assist.
3. He asks for the drinks to be used and goes to where the Nsaguo will be poured followed by his entourage and anyone in the community who wishes to observe.
4. If he is a man, he removes anything he may have on his head, lowers his cloth if he is wearing cloth from his shoulders to his middle of his body as if addressing a chief and he also removes his sandals.
5. He then takes in his right hand, a calabash, or a drinking glass and asks his deputy to pour some of the drink into the glass. The deputy may touch the mouth of the bottle to the top of the drinking glass three times before pouring about the drink into the glass to about a third full. Depending on the occasion, he invokes the great spirit of the sky – the Supreme Being Oyankopon, God, Mother Earth

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<sup>291</sup>Sarpong, *Libation*, p. 18

(Asaase Yaa) and pours the liquid on the ground. He continues with the invocation of the spirits of the ancestors and the spirits believed to be around us, pouring a little bit of the liquid at the end of each invocation; the group around him responds with each invocation and addresses the reason for the meeting asking for the assistance of God and the ancestors for a fruitful meeting.

6. At the end of the invocation and prayers, he empties the calabash completely on to the ground. The group praises his efforts; he puts his sandals and cloth back on and retires to his original seat. A little bit of liquid is poured out with each invocation; consequently, the number of times the liquid is poured will depend on the number of invocations he has to make.
7. The contents of the Nsaguo prayer/invocation are dependent on the purpose and the occasion.
8. Even though the Nsaguo prayer varies according to the various occasions, the prayers at Nsaguo follow a regular pattern and are in three parts. The first part is the prayer on behalf of the person or persons for whom the occasion is being celebrated. The prayer follows in this format – Calling on God, the national deities, in the case of national festivals, ancestors in family gatherings, town meetings, the names of dead chiefs etc.
9. Secondly comes the reason for the assembly and for the pouring of the Nsaguo. This is followed by the supplication or the petition which has occasioned the pouring of the Nsaguo. Then comes the general prayer for common blessings and favors for all the family members and the community both present and absent.
10. The third part is the conclusion which consists of asking all those addressed at the very beginning of the Nsaguo to receive the drink. Whatever remains of the drink in the calabash is poured onto the ground.<sup>292</sup>

In other words Nsaguo consists of the following – invocation of those to whom the Nsaguo is poured, the announcement of the reason for the Nsaguo, the specific petition or request being made, prayers for general blessings and favors and the conclusion. Generally the petition takes the form of asking for prosperity, increase in

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<sup>292</sup> Sarpong, *Libation*, p. 18

population, warding off evil, harm and sudden accidental death and a curse on evil people and the enemies. The actual words are left entirely to the person pouring the Nsaguo.

Men and women alike can perform Nsaguo but it is generally performed by grown-ups. On public occasions, it is usually done by men or linguists or official spokesmen rather than women. The pouring of Nsaguo is considered an honor which is not given to those under the age of puberty.

### **Nsaguo Ritual**

The *Nsaguo* ritual consists of two integral parts, both performed simultaneously by the same individual, in the same place. One part is the prayer said aloud by the person officiating. The other part consists of allowing liquid contained in a drinking glass or calabash held in the right hand of the same person, to drip continually on the ground or objects such as stools or stone. The liquids used for the ritual are liquor, palm wine or water. No liquids other than the aforementioned are used for the ritual. Only one kind of liquid is used at any particular instance.

The description that follows is for a performance in front of a large congregation. Usually, two people are involved, but only one person actually performs the ritual; the other merely assists. For the purpose of clarity and ease of description, the two people participating in the ritual will be Kofi and Yao. Yao will be the principal performer, with Kofi assisting. On Aday day, Yao would be the *Ohene, Ohemaa or Okyeame (linguist)*, and Kofi will be any of the numerous attendants of an Akan king or a palace official or even a relative.

When the ritual is about to begin, Kofi holds the bottle of liquor in his hand. He then opens it in full view of those present. Yao extends his right hand, holding a drinking

glass towards Kofi to receive some of the liquor. Kofi brings the bottle, using both hands, holds it over the proffered drinking glass, and tilts it deftly in a swift down and up motions over the glass so that only a small portion of liquor pours into the glass. Kofi repeats his act two more times. By the third time, the glass would be about a third to a half full. The drinking glass, must not be filled in one motion, or filled to overflowing. It is also important that, the act of transferring liquor from the bottle into the drinking glass is done in three separate steps.

When these preliminary and preparatory actions are completed, Yao is about to begin the ritual. Kofi's role, however, is not over yet. He still stands by Yao's side and as Yao performs the ritual, he says '*we-on*' '*we-on*' at intervals. The congregation does nothing; those present are not invited to sit if they are standing, or to stand if they are seated. Silence is not demanded of the congregation, yet everyone stops talking as soon as they become aware that the prayer has started.

### **Nsaguo ceremony for a conference/workshop**

For this occasion, the person performing the ritual may use liquor or he/she may use water. Water was used to perform the Nsaguo ritual at the October 15 - 17<sup>th</sup> on African Diaspora Leadership Conference as an educational video to be used as a product of this demonstration project. There was a receptacle<sup>293</sup> used into which the water was poured. These were the words of Professor Kofi Asare Opoku as demonstrated at the conference on Saturday October 16, 2010:

I have in my hand a glass/cup full of water.

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<sup>293</sup> A receptacle was used in performing this ritual because it was performed indoors. Usually Mother Earth's drink is poured directly on the ground as well as the ancestors. We offer God a drink we do not give him a drink.

I am going to perform what is called Nsaguo  
in Akan and Libation in English.

If you are wearing shoes, you should take them  
off because you are in the presence of the elders,  
and you should show respect.

If I were wearing a cloth, I would bare my shoulders  
as a sign of respect, then I would pick up the cup;

First I will lift up the glass with my right hand to the  
heavens and say: God Almighty, here is drink  
*(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

Mother Earth, here is drink *(pour a little bit of the  
liquid into the receptacle).*

Our revered ancestors, here is drink. (I can mention  
them by name by beginning from the immediate dead  
to the furthest I can remember and then I will say, you  
are not trees to be counted so when I call on one, I call  
on all of you. To all of you here is drink.

In this ritual that I am performing, I am calling on all  
our ancestors who have preceded us and the message  
goes from generation to generation to the first human  
ancestor who ever lived. *(pour a little bit of the liquid  
into the receptacle).*

So in one breathe I am summoning all those who have  
preceded us here as well as I am calling on all those  
who will be coming after us. I call on all the beings  
above and all the beings below.

All those who are very far away and on all those  
who are very, very close to where I stand and I  
identify myself by my soul name (Kofi) who is  
calling on all these realities and ask: What day is it?  
Today is Saturday and I, your great, great great  
grandson is standing before an audience of students  
and pastors, men and women gathered in New York  
at the New York Theological Seminary and I am calling  
on all of you to inform you about what we are about to do.  
*(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

We are about to hold discussions under the auspices of  
TIDAC and we are going to be talking about African

culture and the relationship between Christianity and culture and other matters. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

May our discussions go well in accordance with your wishes and may all of us benefit from what we are going to learn today. We ask for blessings on every participant and their families – blessings on every nation of the earth, may all of us live in peace and may prosperity and blessings guide us and accompany us throughout our lives. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

If there are others who do not wish us well, please hold them in abeyance; don't let them come near us. *(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

Blessings on us! Blessings on us! Blessings on us  
*(pour a little bit of the liquid into the receptacle).*

This will be Nsaguo (a libation). When I call on the Creator, God Almighty, and Mother Earth, I call on the two powers on whom we depend on. Then I call on the ancestors, calling and demonstrating the belief that we have in Africa that death does not separate us from our loved ones. To die does not mean to cease to exist. In fact, when we talk about our families, communities and society, we are referring to the part of society that are also not visible. We talk about those who are visible and those who are not visible. Reality has two aspects the visible and the invisible. Reality has two aspects, the visible and the invisible. The Universe has two aspects – the seen and the unseen but everything that exists reflects this reality – a part that is seen and a part that is unseen.

Reality goes beyond our sense experiences. What we see, feel, or touch or smell or taste is not all of reality. It is only a part of reality and those who believe in that which is not seen is not against Christianity. And so we and our ancestors established ways in

which they related to reality – seen and unseen. There is not a way of dealing with reality.

A wise person said if the only thing you have is a hammer, you treat everything like a nail. There are some realities in which a hammer is useless. In the presence of realities, you may need an axe or a hoe or a cutlass so our ancestors established different ways of dealing with these realities and the Nsaguo (the libation) I just poured is one of them. I invited all our ancestors/ realities to be present at the conference today. I will insert the soul names of the Akan prior to going through the Nsaguo ceremony for a child naming.

### **Akan Male and Female Kra (Soul) Names**

According to a prevalent system among the Akan people, the first name of every child derives from the day on which he or she was born. The male and female names corresponding to the names of the seven days of the week as well as their honorific addresses or responses are displayed in Table 2.1 (given slight local variations).<sup>294</sup>

Traditional Akan Male and Female Day Names

<i>Name of Day</i>	<i>Male Name</i>	<i>Female Name</i>	<i>Address of Appellation</i>
Kwasiada (Sunday) <b>Koyasiada</b>	<b>Kwasi</b> , Akwasi	Akosua <b>Asi</b> , Akwasia	Yaa-Awusi <b>Yaa-Awasi</b>
Dwoada (Monday) <b>Yuda</b>	Kwadwo, Awua <b>Kwawiau</b> , <b>Kwayu</b>	Adwoa, (Awia), <b>Ayua</b>	Yaa-Adwo <b>Yaa-Ayu</b>
Benada ( Tuesday) <b>Ben(e)ada, Beda</b>	Kwabena <b>Kwabeda</b> , <b>Kwabe</b>	Abena <b>Abeda</b> , Abea	Yaa-Abena <b>Yaa-Abeda</b>

<sup>294</sup>Oduro-Mensah, Daniel. *Akanism and Hebrewism*. (Accra, Ghana: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007)p. 17.



Wukuada (Wednesday) <b>Yukuda</b>	Kwaku, <b>Kwawuku</b> <b>Kwayuku</b>	Akua, Ayukua <b>Awukua</b>	Yaa-Aku <b>Yaa-Awuku</b>
Yawoada (Thursday) <b>Yawoda</b>	Yaw(o), Kwaw(o) <b>Kwayawo</b>	Aya, Awo, <b>Ayawoa, Yaa</b>	Yaa-Awo <b>Yaa-yaa</b>
Fiada (Friday) <b>Fida</b>	<b>Kwafi</b> , (Kwaofi) Kwafie, Kofie, Kofi	Afua, <b>Afia</b>	<b>Yaa-Afi</b>
(Saturday) Memenda, Memeeda, <b>Memenada</b>	<b>Kwamemen</b> <b>Kwamen</b> (Kwame)	Amma <b>Amemena</b>	<b>Yaa-Amen</b> <b>Yaa-Ame</b>

NB - Likely original Akan male/female names and their appellations; those which have become corrupted over the ages are in bold letters

It can be seen from the table that the day name of a male child born on Saturday, Kwame, whose address is Amen, is the same as the Akan day name of God, Kwame, and the same appellation Amen, a term which is also exactly the same in spelling as the biblical Amen (interestingly the same use and meaning too!). Akans therefore regard God as a male being; one whose special day or "birthday" is Saturday.

### **Words of Nsaguo in a child naming ceremony**

The ceremony starts very early in the morning. Close relatives, friends and neighbors come from far and near to participate. Mother and child are clad in white symbolizing victory over death since pregnancy and childbirth are considered serious rites of passage.<sup>295</sup> The following are the details of the format and words of an Akan

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<sup>295</sup>Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans", 28

Traditional Naming Ceremony. This ceremony is often conducted by the oldest surviving woman in the family.<sup>296</sup>

### **PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Great God of our forebears  
You upon whom we lean without falling  
Accept our offer  
Mother earth who gives us life and takes us  
Back at the evening of our life  
Accept our thanksgiving and offering  
The Gods and Spirits of  
Our mother Africa  
Grant us your ears.  
Spirits and gods of Ghana  
We request your presence  
The gods and spirits of Akan  
Come and share what we offer  
We offer you all we have.  
Nana Yaa Otema  
The great Oak Tree  
That offers shade to all our spring  
We bless your name and offer you drink<sup>297</sup>

Nana Appiah Kubi  
Eno Abena Sooa Kantanka  
Your son and grandchildren  
Praise and bless your names  
Come and dine with us  
Ancestors and living  
Of the Asona and Aduana clan  
We offer you drink.  
Nana Agyekum Sabraw  
Akurama Nyamaa  
If it is not dark  
The branching road cannot be missing  
When we call hear us.  
For it is only the parents  
Who know the favorite food of their children

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<sup>296</sup> Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans", 28

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.,

The whole Asona and Aduana clan and ancestry  
Arise and accept our offer.<sup>298</sup>

### **THE ANNOUNCEMENT**

We call on you all today  
Our great and true God, Mother Earth  
Our mother Africa, Ghana,  
Akan and Aduana Busua and  
All the Spirit of the Rivers  
“Epo Abena” (Mother Sea)  
With great thanks and joy<sup>299</sup>

Nana Kwabena Mnyan  
Ena Amma Firempomaa Obaapa, Firempon - Manso  
Yaa Otema-Kromo  
Bretuo Clan  
Be all ears for the good news<sup>300</sup>

Through your kindness, love and grace  
You have blessed the womb of your daughter Akotua  
You have blessed the name and marriage of  
Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Akosua Dedaa  
You have blessed them with a beautiful baby girl  
Though she is their child  
She is also the child  
Of the community of the Dead,  
The living and the yet unborn.

For this reason and many untold blessings  
We offer our prayer of thanks  
And our food and drinks  
We dedicate our entire life to you.<sup>301</sup>

### **DEDICATION**

We pray and ask for your blessings

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<sup>298</sup>Appiah-Kubi, “*Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans*”, 29.

<sup>299</sup>Ibid.

<sup>300</sup>Ibid.

<sup>301</sup>Ibid., 30

Grant this child long life and obedience  
Grant her love for her people and all human kind  
Grant her wisdom and understanding  
Let her off - spring be as many  
As the sand of the shore  
Let her roots be as firm as the oak Tree, Odum  
Do not let her be just a passerby  
But rather a permanent member  
Of her society and nation<sup>302</sup>

Bless the Father and the Mother  
Bless the entire family  
Grant them knowledge of understanding  
And good parenthood  
In order that they may bring this  
Child up in the best possible way  
Bless her grandparents.  
Bless all those gathered here today<sup>303</sup>

That they may be the best  
And fruitful teachers of this child  
We ask for peace, love and prosperity  
For our nations, people and all human kind.<sup>304</sup>

### **ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CHILD'S NAME**

When the elders has counsel  
With the ancestors  
They unanimously agreed that  
The name of the child is<sup>305</sup>  
(name of the child)

Now friends, brothers and sisters  
From today on, you are  
All witnesses  
That the name of this child is

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<sup>302</sup>Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans", 29.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid.

<sup>304</sup>Ibid, 30.

<sup>305</sup>Ibid .

ABENA OTEMA  
Let all of you and the world  
Know that this child  
Has no other name but this.<sup>306</sup>

## **RITUAL OF COMMITMENT (SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS)**

### **WATER**

Now ABENA OTEMA  
Drink this water  
This is the fountain of life  
You shall always be  
The fountain of Life  
To your parents, family and nation

### **WINE**

Accept this drink  
You shall be as sweet as wine  
And all your offspring  
Shall be as sweet as wine<sup>307</sup>

### **SALT**

Take this salt  
Accept this and become  
A living soul.  
Be as honest as the taste of the elements  
When you say it is water or then wine or salt  
It is truly water, wine or salt.

You are the salt of Africa and humankind  
Always remember that a meaningless life  
Is like food without salt.  
So let your life be a shining example

To all African people and humankind  
Be faithful in all you say and do

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<sup>306</sup>Appiah-Kubi, “*Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans*”, 31.

<sup>307</sup>Ibid., 29

Be honest to yourself  
To all people living, dead and yet unborn  
Have a peaceful, long and fruitful life.<sup>308</sup>

## **RITUAL OF BLESSINGS AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE CHILD AMONG THE LIVING**

(Mother and Father shall accompany  
The leader with the child)  
Let the blessing of the Great God  
Ancestors, the Spirits of the living.  
The Dead and the unborn  
Be upon our child.

### **ABENA OTEMA**

We all welcome you with love  
Into our community  
Come and strengthen the love and respect  
For our mother and father  
Come and strengthen us all  
We wish you a long and  
Prosperous life.

### **And now ABENA OTEMA**

Whoever will make you suffer  
Or your parents, family and people suffer  
Because of jealousy, prejudice  
Or any other unfounded reasons  
Let his/her evil thoughts and acts be revealed  
To our True and only God  
Our Ancestors and Spirits,  
Our warriors, and elders

The Living and the Dead  
And the yet unborn  
And let him/her suffer  
From his/her wickedness.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Appiah-Kubi, "Case Studies: Naming Ceremonies – Case Study 1- The Akans", 30.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 31

The Ohum festival is another occasion where Nsaguo is performed. Different towns celebrate their different festivals at different times of the year depending on historical events. This is an occasion where the ancestors play an important role in the lives of the people.

### **An Nsaguo Ceremony**

An African proverb tells us that people who lack the knowledge of their pasts are like a tree without roots. So, in the spirit of remembrance, we pour this libation. We pour to honor the past, so that we may learn from it. We pour to honor the importance of family and friends. We raise our cup to God to show our reverence for the original source of our lives. We use cool water as a symbol of the continuity of life, to purify and to nourish our souls. We pour to celebrate the memory of the departed.

Place your minds with those who could not be here today. Family, friends and ancestors who have passed on, are ill, or simply could not find their way here. Place your thoughts with this person or persons and if you feel so moved say their name aloud. Asante (*Thank You*). Please say it after the name. We cast our libation to the North, to the South, to the East and to the West. We wish everyone to leave today more blessed than when they arrived.

### **Words of Nsaguo in a child naming ceremony (for the Ga of Ghana)**

The Ga people of Ghana are coastal people located at the southeastern section of Ghana. A variation of their child naming ceremony was shown in Alex Haley's book and subsequent movie "Roots". I would like to include this naming ceremony to show similarities and differences to the Akan.

At the “outdooring”<sup>310</sup> of the child, there are eleven officiants – eight from the paternal family and three from the maternal family. The principal officiant is an elderly person from the paternal family (the sex depends on whether the child is male or female) who is chosen for his or her admirable character. The first duty of the principal officiant is to preside over the entire ceremony and pour libation and recite the prayer. Libation is first performed with corn wine and the officiant says in part:<sup>311</sup>

What is today, Today is Monday (*or whatever  
day of the week it is*)  
Grandfather’s Monday, Grandmother’s Monday  
Today we will show the stranger  
That sojourns with us to the Morning Star  
May it respect the world’  
May you (*the ancestors*) receive some of this  
Wine and drink, that you may bless it.<sup>312</sup>

After this, the rite is repeated but this time using a stronger drink usually schnapps. After that, the spot where the libation was poured is swept clean so the child can be placed down it. After that the child is brought out naked and handed over to the officiant who lifts it up three times into the air saying:

Lo, today we are showing the stranger,  
That sojourns with us to the Morning Star

The child is then placed three times on the ground and left there the third time. Water is then sprinkled on it three times. The child is thus introduced to the earth and to

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<sup>310</sup> The term outdooring comes from the fact that until the day the child is named, the mother and child have been indoors the whole time; thus this is usually the first time the child has been brought outside the home.

<sup>311</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku, “*West African Traditional Religion*,” 108.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 108



the rain and then blessed by the officiant three times. After this the officiant gently kicks the child with his/her left foot, saying: I am striking you with my foot (*meaning become like me*).

Next the child is picked up from the ground and given corn wine to taste. The officiant dips his finger into the corn wine and lets drops of it fall on the child's tongue. The outdoor prayer is recited by the officiant with everybody present responding at the end of each sentence with "Yes indeed". The prayer is as follows:<sup>313</sup>

Hail, Hail, Hail, May happiness come.  
Are our voices one?  
Hail, let happiness come.  
Are our voices one?  
Hail let happiness come.  
The Stranger who has come, his back is towards the darkness.  
His face is towards the light.  
May he work for his father.  
May he work for his mother  
May he not steal.  
May he not be wicked.  
The children of this family forgive everything that can be forgiven.  
May he eat by the work of his five fingers.  
May he come to respect the world.

Upon his mother's head, Life.  
Upon his father's head, Life.  
If we should join up to make a circle,  
May our chain be complete.  
If we dig a well may we come upon water.  
If we draw water to bathe our joints may they be refreshed.  
If we see white clay may it be white clay.  
Circumspect Ga, like the blowing wind be better than your word.  
You see, but you have not seen.  
You hear, but you have not heard,  
A circumspect Ga does not lie.  
If you lie down, think about your work.  
Today if any witch or sorcerer is passing and asks  
what we are doing and they tell him and he says any

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<sup>313</sup>Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 109

evil word or wishes that the child lying here shall die,  
shall this blessing be to bless him?  
May Wednesday and Sunday kill him  
Let us hoot upon his head.  
Hail! Let happiness come.  
Are our voices one?  
Hail! Let happiness come.<sup>314</sup>

The name of the child is then announced by the principal officiant and corn wine is offered round, each person repeating the 'stranger's' name before sipping. The stranger has thus become a full member of the family and has its own name. It is then presented with gifts and the ceremony ends with feasting and merry-making.

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<sup>314</sup> Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, 110.









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